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By C. Dennis Ignasias

Propaganda and Public Opinion in Harding's Foreign Affairs: the Case for Mexican Recognition

To a considerable extent, recognition of the Obregon government reflected the effects of a propaganda campaign directed at the American public and its congressional representatives.

► In a critique on the difficulty of interpretation and assessment of the role of public opinion in the determination of American foreign policy, historian Ernest May concludes:

Our chief reason for believing that public opinion has influenced and does influence foreign policy is our knowledge that American statesmen have traditionally thought themselves responsible to, and supported or constrained by, some sort of general will.¹

Consequently scholars in May's judgment should seek to discover what American statesmen thought they heard. Or, as May stated earlier in his article:

... very few historical works have paid adequate attention to mail trends or to the presuppositions of statesmen or the methods they have used to assess public opinion.²

¹ Ernest May, "An American Tradition in Foreign Policy: The Role of Public Opinion," *Theory and Practice in American Politics*, William H. Nelson and Francis L. Loewenheim, eds. (Chicago, 1964), p. 121.

² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

No period of 20th century American foreign policy has been without some such influence. Arguments can be advanced for cases of executive leadership in the creation or execution of policy, for others, of the initiative of congress and the "public" in the voicing of trends, or the interplay between government and citizen. A frequently cited breaking point on policy-making between executive leadership and congressional-public pressure has been the election of 1920 in which the latter source gained ascendancy over the next two decades. While this shift in equilibrium was probably more exaggerated than realistic, policymakers reacted to world problems after World War I with both restraint and caution. The forces of change—revolution in Russia, economic, political, psychological dislocation in Europe, Japan's dominance in Asia, the rise of anti-colonialism in the non-Western world—had to be evaluated in light of what role the United States could, and would, play in the world. Domestic considerations were given a priority in policy-making. As Warren G. Harding's inaugural address of March 4, 1921, suggested:

The success of our popular government

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[in the United States] rests wholly upon the correct interpretation of the deliberate, intelligent, dependable popular will of America.³

Ernest May's conclusions regarding public opinion and foreign policy-making might be tested by an evaluation of what Harding meant by, and how he responded to, the "correct interpretation" of the "popular will." A case in point would be the recognition by the Harding administration of the Álvaro Obregón government in Mexico. Obregón took office as President on December 1, 1920, three months before Harding. Over a subsequent two-and-a-half-year period Obregón sought diplomatic recognition through the formal channels of the State Department, an informal appeal to Harding for an executive agreement, and a propaganda campaign directed at the American public and its representatives in Congress. To a considerable extent Obregón's recognition by September 1923 reflected the latter conditioning process of public and congressional opinion upon the State Department's policy.⁴ What will be studied is the propaganda mechanism of the Mexican government which acted as a stimuli upon organs of opinion in the United States, and the presuppositions of American policy-makers regarding that opinion.

An integral part of the recognition question was the American attitude toward Mexico by 1919-1920 and the value placed upon recognition by the Obregón government. A decade of civil war in Mexico after the Revolution of 1910 had caused injury, death and destruction of property to Americans and other aliens in the country. The original motives of political reform had been broadened by 1917 to include socio-economic goals.⁵ Foreign interests were being affected both physically and constitutionally.

The armistice in Europe in late 1918 brought to public attention again the existence of unsolved problems with

Mexico. During the summer and autumn of 1919 there was some expression in the press and periodicals for forceful action in Mexico to stabilize the country,⁶ but Washington procrastinated. The most active support for intervention came from a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee organized in August 1919 to investigate the Mexican Revolution as it had thus far affected American lives and property.⁷ Chaired by Republican Senator Albert B. Fall (a persistent interventionist and Wilson critic), the subcommittee's 10-month investigation was designed to emotionally provoke the American public to demand redress. Its final report on May 28, 1920, not only indicted the Wilson administration for its inept handling of the Mexican problem over the past eight years, but argued that the national honor was

³ Cited in Jennings B. Sanders, *A College History of the United States* (Evanston, 1962), II, 319-20.

⁴ For studies of Republican foreign policy in the early 1920s, see L. Ethan Ellis, *Republican Foreign Policy, 1921-1933* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1968), Chapter VII on Mexico; John Chalmers Vinson, "Charles Evans Hughes," *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century*, Norman A. Graebner, ed. (New York, 1961), pp. 128-36; Betty Glad, *Charles Evans Hughes and the Illusions of Innocence: A Study in American Diplomacy* (Urbana, 1966), pp. 142-5; Dexter Perkins, "The Department of State and American Public Opinion," *The Diplomats, 1919-1939*, Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds. (New York, 1965), I, 282-6; Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction* (New York, 1961), p. 114ff. A more extensive account of American policy and Obregón's recognition is Eugene P. Trani, "Harding Administration and Recognition of Mexico," *Ohio History*, LXXV, No. 2 & 3 (Spring-Summer, 1966), 137-48.

⁵ An introductory survey to the problems of the period is found in Howard F. Cline's *The United States and Mexico*, Rev. ed. (New York, 1963), pp. 113-92.

⁶ See *Literary Digest* for June and August, 1919; *New York Times*, July and August; *Outlook*, July and December, 1919; *Collier's*, January and March, 1920. This sentiment in 1919 was countered by books, pamphlets, and periodicals opposing intervention; e.g., in the *Nation* and *New Republic*, the proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, and several Protestant churches with missions in Mexico. The congressional hearing in footnote 7 below contains brief resumes of the conflicting opinion concerning Mexico in 1919.

⁷ U. S. Congress, Senate, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess.; Sen. Doc. 285, 2 vols., 1920; for the final report, see II, 3368-73. Consult also J. Fred Rippy's summation of congressional sentiment in his *The United States and Mexico* (New York, 1926), pp. 353-4.

now at stake. Mexico was either to capitulate on the subcommittee's terms or face severance of diplomatic relations and possibly military occupation. A coup d'état the same month, however, eased tensions and prevented either alternative.

Obregón's delayed recognition might have been avoided if circumstances in the last months of Wilson's second term had been more auspicious. When Venustiano Carranza was overthrown in May 1920 the interim regime of Adolfo de la Huerta, a close colleague of Obregón, sought *de facto* recognition.⁸ Discussion continued into late fall when Wilson was prompted to send a personal emissary to Mexico in October. Acting upon Wilson's proposals, George Creel reached an agreement with de la Huerta and President-elect Obregón. Although Mexico City was willing to accept in principle the State Department's terms, the Department hesitated, and Wilson remained cautious.⁹ The failure of negotiations and the continued policy of "Watchful Waiting" left Obregón with no choice but to deal with the Republican administration.

Unlike his predecessor Wilson who

exercised the executive role, Harding was a domestic politician unsure of himself in the arena of world politics. He had served only briefly on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the crucial years of the debate on the League of Nations and reflected many of the historical biases of Americans toward the world power structure.¹⁰ His belief in the supremacy of American political life and the discernment of the vox populi was a parochial or traditionalist outlook. He equivocated on the campaign issues and indulged in what one historian has referred to as "virtue-words."¹¹ When former presidential candidate and jurist Charles Evans Hughes accepted the post of secretary of state, Harding must have felt relieved of worry over awesome duties. On February 19, 1921, he introduced Hughes to the press with the advice that "'from this time on, Gentlemen, you will get your news as to the foreign relations of the United States from the State Department.'"¹²

Upon Harding's inauguration Hughes acted to formulate a policy for Mexico, hoping to avoid what he considered Wilson's earlier mistakes.¹³ By early 1921 the Mexican problem had crystallized into one major issue, the interpretation of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. The article sanctioned a nationalization policy which seemed to infringe upon the rights of American citizens to property legitimately acquired in Mexico prior to the promulgation of the new legislation. To secure those rights as well as to obtain a settlement of outstanding claims between the two countries, Hughes chose the political weapon of diplomatic recognition. Recognition was to be withheld from the Obregón government until satisfactory and statutory guarantees were forthcoming from Mexico City.¹⁴ The State Department had likewise considered an alternative to the technique of non-recognition if it failed. But military force as occasionally used by Wilson was not politically

⁸ Refer to Chapter XXVII of Herbert I. Priestley, *The Mexican Nation, A History* (New York, 1938); John W. F. Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936* (Austin, 1961), pp. 18-36.

⁹ Consult State Department Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Decimal File Group 711.12/ and 812.00/ (hereafter cited as NA followed by file number) for June through November, 1920, especially George Creel's letters in October and November. See also Trani, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-9.

¹⁰ David, H. Jennings, "President Harding and International Organization," *Ohio History*, LXXV, No. 2 & 3 (Spring-Summer, 1966), 149-65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹² As quoted by C. C. Hyde, "Charles Evans Hughes," *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, Samuel Flagg Bemis, ed. (New York, 1929), X, pp. 223-4.

¹³ State Department Memorandum, April 27, 1921, NA, 711.1211/213. An official statement was released to the press on June 7; Hughes to chargé d'affaires in Mexico City, George T. Summerlin, June 8, 1921, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921* (hereafter *For. Rel.*), II, 406-7.

¹⁴ Hughes regarded the recognition of foreign governments within the exclusive jurisdiction of executive powers. See Glad, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

feasible in a time of demand for tax relief and reduced armaments spending and a search for world peace.

In 1921 Alvaro Obregón was principally concerned with reconstruction, not revolution. Mexico needed a period of peace, stability and prosperity before the dormant goals of the Revolution might begin to be implemented.¹⁵ Without recognition, neither objective was entirely possible. In a country with a long tradition of political instability, election to public office was not necessarily a legitimization of power. More than one government in the past had endured rather than fallen because of the foreign assistance for a recognized government. More importantly, legal accreditation in the world community assisted the flow of trade and commerce, capital and credit from foreign sources.¹⁶

For both prestigious and economic reasons recognition from the United States was highly desirable. No European country after World War I could provide the capital for loans and investment and the industrial and agricultural machinery as the United States. Financially, American assets in Mexico by 1910 were more than half of the combined total of British, French and other foreign and native investments.¹⁷ The fields of American interest included nearly every major economic activity from mining, oil and ranching to manufacturing, banking and public utilities.¹⁸ Logically, Obregón directed his appeal to the United States on the new image for Mexico.

Obregón's most valuable asset was his middle class appearance.¹⁹ Before he had joined the revolutionary cause and distinguished himself as a military tactician and hero, he showed management ability in the operation of a flour mill and a mechanics shop, and as an agent for a farm machinery concern. After successfully growing and marketing chickpeas on rented farm land, he invented a machine which sowed chickpeas. He now purchased his own land,

and by the time of the Revolution was a solvent farmer.²⁰ His military career made him the most powerful and respected general of the Revolution, and his support of social change and legislation for labor and the agrarian element gave him widespread popularity. From businessmen, journalists and diplomats—Mexican and non-Mexican alike—he was complimented on his good judgment and common sense, his integrity, sincerity and resolution. An editorial in the *New York Times* perhaps best described the emerging conception of Obregón by referring to him as "a practical business man of the conservative type."²¹

In conjunction with his petitioning in Washington, Obregón utilized five channels of propaganda to lobby with the American public. Some measures were a continuation of earlier techniques such as travel excursions to Mexico. Agencies and consulates of the Mexican government, for example, already existed in major American cities and had been distributing pamphlets and magazines in both English and Spanish.

Obregón's initial target was the American businessman. As early as 1919 numerous excursions of manufacturers, exporters, bankers and delegates from chambers of commerce from various cities had officially toured Mexico.²² Despite lingering disorder

¹⁵ See Charles W. Hackett, "The New Regime in Mexico," *Southwestern Political Science Quarterly*, II, No. 1 (June 1921), 66-72; Carlton Beals, *Mexico, An Interpretation* (New York, 1923), Chapter VII; Chester Lloyd Jones, *Mexico And Its Reconstruction* (New York, 1921).

¹⁶ Refer to the summary of literature on diplomatic recognition in Clyde Eagleton, *International Government*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1957), pp. 73-7.

¹⁷ Office of the Chief of Staff of the War Dept., *American and Foreign Capital Invested in Mexico*, March 14, 1914, NA, 812.502/19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Cleona Lewis, *America's Stake in International Investments* (Washington, D.C., 1938), pp. 612-14.

¹⁹ A descriptive account of Obregón's career is found in Dulles, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-267.

²⁰ Edwin Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism: The Political Rise And Fall Of The Revolutionary Army, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque, 1968), pp. 57-61.

²¹ *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 1920; see also editorials for Oct. 9 and Dec. 3.

within the country the excursions presented an optimistic impression of the potentialities of renewed commercial ties. Several participants stressed Mexico's seemingly unlimited natural resources and the opportunities to develop this natural market for the United States.²³ By the autumn of 1920 Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, all of which had continuously implored Washington the preceding year for reprisals against the Carranza government, became the nucleus of a noticeable changing attitude towards their southern neighbor. Hundreds of delegates from local chambers of commerce, merchant organizations and banks within these states were conducted on national tours throughout Mexico. The reports of these groups,

printed in the press or sent to Washington, expressed a similar message of increased confidence in Mexico's future.²⁴

With large Mexican-American populations and proximity to the Mexican border these southwestern states were a fertile soil for the cultivation of an atmosphere of friendliness and good will. Obregón's first visit to the United States as President-elect was a tour of Texas; wherever he went, large crowds welcomed him.²⁵ Among dinner guests at receptions for him were the governors of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. From the autumn of 1920 throughout early 1923 dozens of resolutions to recognize Obregón from southwestern chambers of commerce, business organizations, Protestant religious societies and Mexican-American associations flooded the State Department.²⁶ Resolutions from the state legislatures, individual congressmen and governors of the southwestern states were more frequent in that three-year period than were those from any other section of the country. All the resolutions paralleled Obregón's arguments to Washington: the cordiality and desire for friendship along the border and the steps taken toward the pacification and economic rehabilitation of the country.

The demand for excursions had increased so rapidly by late 1921 that an American firm, the Mexico-American (sic) Excursion Co., was contracted by Obregón to conduct them.²⁷ Representatives of American mining, engineering and chemical firms and railway equipment companies commented on the lucrative trade opportunities for all varieties of products. Compared to postwar Europe, the financial and potential economic recovery of Mexico was viewed as most auspicious.²⁸

The second medium of propaganda was the Financial Agency of the Mexican Government in New York City directed by Manuel Vargas. The agency served both as a clearing house

²³ A partial list of cities would include Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, New Orleans, San Francisco; in Texas—Dallas, El Paso, Houston, Laredo, San Antonio and others. In a number of these cities Mexican merchants had been exhibiting their major products since 1918. In February 1920 a commercial conference sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico and held in Mexico City was reported to have had 500 members representing 57 American and 27 Mexican cities. *Mexican Review*, February 1920, p. 34.

²⁴ Philip H. Middleton, *Industrial Mexico: 1919 Facts and Figures* (New York, 1919); Edward Dwight Trowbridge, "Another Picture of Mexico," *Outlook*, Sept. 10, 1919, pp. 56-7; "Mexican Events Warrant Belief That Better Times Are At Hand," *The Americas* (published by the National City Bank of New York), May 1920, pp. 1-5.

²⁵ See examples in Warren G. Harding Papers, Ohio State Historical Society, Columbus, Box 42 and 478.

²⁶ *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 18, 1920, p. 19, p. 1.

²⁷ See NA, Decimal File Group 812.00/ for 1920 through 1923, and Archivo General de la Nación, 104-R1-E-2 Pq 15-1 (hereafter cited as AGN followed by folder number). The latter selected Mexican documents are on deposit in 20 reels at the Michigan State University library. Occasionally the resolutions were printed in the press, periodicals and the (U. S.) *Congressional Record*.

²⁸ A later company supposedly transported more than 1,000 persons on excursions. Data (probably 1921) submitted by commercial agent, Mauricio Carranza, AGN, 104-R1-E-1 Pq 15-1.

²⁹ Refer to the study of the U.S. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Thomas R. Taylor and Bernard H. Noll, "Mexico as a Field for American Trade Expansion," *Annals*, XCIV (March 1921), pp. 76-80. See also, "Our New Market In Mexico," *System: The Magazine of Business*, February 1921, p. 194ff; "The Tide of Affairs," *Century*, July 1921, pp. 472-4; "The Problem of Business with Mexico," *Weekly Review*, July 23, 1921, pp. 76-7.

for propaganda funds and expenses of the Mexican consulates in the United States as well as a storehouse of information on the activities of Americans engaged in propaganda.²⁹ Vargas reasoned that ignorance or bias toward Mexico could be effectively countered by impressive statistics.³⁰ An example of Vargas' operations was the contract made with the New York *Commercial*, a leading and highly accredited business magazine. For the payment of \$6,000, 37,000 copies of a 25-page illustrated and editorialized supplement to the magazine were to be printed.³¹ The supplement's summary of the resources and recent trends within Mexico was designed to impress upon the reader that diplomatic recognition would solidify Mexico's progress.

For a third category of propaganda Obregón appealed to a reading and to an educated public. The monthly magazine, *Mexican Review*, circulated in the United States until January 1922. Sponsored by Carranza in 1916, the magazine offered feature articles on Mexican life and current conditions as well as official statements, statistics and proposed legislation. Issues were generally donated to libraries in large cities and to leading colleges and universities. Obregón employed the noted foreign correspondent for the London *Daily Telegraph*, Dr. Emile J. Dillon, as his publicity writer. Dillon portrayed Obregón as the statesman of a new moral order in the world, a man above political conflicts and party interests whose role was hampered by the insecurity of not enjoying U.S. recognition.³² One of Obregón's more active campaigners was the newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, who visited his Mexican properties in 1921. Over the next year and a half the newspapers and magazines controlled by his syndicate, in addition to a series of articles written by Hearst himself, reflected a highly optimistic appraisal of Mexico's development and the desirability of Obregón's recognition.³³

Whenever professional news agencies or American newspapers requested feature stories or interviews, Obregón quickly replied with an explanation of his position.³⁴ In 1921 the most widely quoted interview was Obregón's reply to the New York *World* published on June 27th.

A fourth method of propaganda was directed at state legislatures. Over a two-year period as ex-state senator from Arizona, J. L. Schleimer was a paid lecturer to speak on the subject of Obregón's recognition. Apparently a very gifted speaker, he was responsible for influencing nearly 23 state legislatures throughout the Midwest, West, and South to send resolutions to Wash-

²⁹ Manuel Vargas to Obregón, April 4, May 4, 1921, AGN, 242-A-1-D. There were 54 Mexican consulates located in the United States and in its overseas possessions. Robert G. Cleland, ed., *The Mexican Year Book: The Standard Authority on Mexico, 1920/21* (Los Angeles, 1922), p. 216.

³⁰ Several organizations were simultaneously distributing their own propaganda protesting the alleged hostility of the Obregón regime toward the property rights of foreigners. Among them were the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico and its two subsidiaries, the Association of Producers of Petroleum in Mexico and the American Petroleum Institute; also, the American Association of Mexico; the Association of American Owners of Lands in Mexico; and the International Association for the Advancement of Religious and Political Liberty. See New York *Times*, Jan. 18, 30, 1919, p. 13, p. 15; NA 812.00/25427; 711.12/346, 442.

³¹ Vargas to Obregón, April 7, 1921, AGN, 242-A-1-D.

³² See his "Alvaro Obregón: As Military Leader," *Saturday Evening Post*, Nov. 20, 1920, p. 14ff; *Mexico on the Verge* (New York, 1921); "Mexico Revisited," *Contemporary Review* (London), November 1921, pp. 607-16; "Mexico and World Reconstruction," *Quarterly Review* (London), July 1922, pp. 143-62; *President Obregón, a world reformer* (Boston and London, 1923).

³³ A list of newspapers, magazines and news services owned by Hearst is found in John K. Winkler, *W. R. Hearst: An American Phenomenon* (New York, 1928), p. 319. Four articles by Hearst were reprinted in a pamphlet, *It is Time to Recognize the Present Stable Government of Mexico* (New York, 1922). A report from the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, revealed that Obregón had supposedly contracted Hearst for the sum of \$210,000 to publish propaganda for his recognition. Attorney General H. M. Daugherty to Harding, Feb. 23, 1922, Harding Papers, Box 167.

³⁴ For example, K. A. Bickel, general news manager of United Press, to Obregón, May 24, 1921; Obregón to Bickel, May 25, 1921, AGN, 104-R1-E-5 Pq 15-1.

ington petitioning for Obregón's recognition.³⁵ At least one other senator, John Smith, R-Mich., assisted him.

A final approach to Obregón's propaganda network involved several personal and unofficial representatives in Washington. Obregón's legal adviser Myron M. Parker, a New York City attorney Byron S. Butcher, and free lance writer Robert Hammond Murray frequently presented memoranda to the State Department and in turn informed Obregón of the temperament in Washington.³⁶ Obregón's most confidential agent in the capital during 1921 was Elmer Dover. As a personal friend of both Presidents, Dover played a dual role. He was in Obregón's pay as an

official agent while simultaneously acting as a special representative of President Harding to Obregón.³⁷ Because of his friendship with Harding, Obregón had chosen Dover to offer the suggestion of an executive agreement to break the diplomatic impasse. Hughes, however, overruled the suggestion.³⁸

Obregón's cause was indirectly aided by sympathetic groups, organizations and individuals. More than 30 private and state colleges and universities in the United States expressed interest in a cultural exchange of Mexican and American students and initiated a program to train Mexican youths.³⁹ The recently formed Foreign Policy Association emphasized the long-range value for the United States to resolve its problems with a weaker nation such as Mexico without unduly wounding the latter's sensitivity or interfering with its domestic affairs.⁴⁰ Having generally escaped the anti-religious fury launched against the Catholic Church, Protestant denominations with missionary branches in Mexico welcomed Obregón's reconstruction program as their advantage to "enlighten" the peon.⁴¹ The American Federation of Labor, active under Samuel Gompers' leadership for labor organization in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, endorsed Obregón's position.⁴² Two magazines of the liberal-progressive shade, the *Nation* and the *New Republic*, had become the "devil's advocates" of American foreign policy in the 1920s and through innuendos revealed their conception of a conspiratorial trilogy of Wall Street bankers, American oil interests, and Secretary of Interior Albert B. Fall blocking Obregón's recognition.⁴³ The managing editor of the *Nation*, Ernest Gruening, personally admired and frequently visited Mexico.⁴⁴

Sometimes Obregón's most sincere sympathizers were officials of the American government, such as Colonel Harvey W. Miller, acting military attaché for the American embassy in

³⁵ The states for which resolutions exist in the State Department archives were Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, North and South Dakota, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California. NA, Decimal File Group 812.00/; AGN, 104-R1-E6 Pq 15-1. The majority of the resolutions attributed their origin to an address by Schleimer. Chargé Summerlin in Mexico City notified Washington of Schleimer's activities; Summerlin to Hughes, Aug. 17, 1921, April 7, 1923, NA, 812.00/25153, 26307.

³⁶ The correspondence is in AGN, 104-R1-E-9 Pq 16.

³⁷ Whether Harding was completely aware of this dual role is debatable. He must have trusted Dover whom he appointed assistant secretary of the treasury in April 1922. Dover was probably Harding's only authorized representative to Obregón though other Americans would claim to speak for Harding. Refer to the miscellaneous data on Mexico in Harding Papers, Box 167; see also AGN, 104-R1-D Pq 15-1, on Dover.

³⁸ Hughes Memorandum of an interview with Elmer Dover, June 23, 1921, Hughes Papers, Box 176; Harding to Obregón, July 21, 1921, *For. Rels.*, 1921, II, pp. 419-23.

³⁹ *New York Times*, Feb. 26, 1921, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Charles P. Howland of the Association sent a brief to Hughes entitled "In the Matter of the Settlement of Disputed Questions Between Mexico and the United States," April 20, 1921, NA, 812.00 P81/13.

⁴¹ William A. Ross, *Sunrise in Aztec Land* . . . (Richmond, Va., 1922); George B. Winton, "The Mexican Revolution and Missions," *Missionary Review of the World*, August 1920, pp. 693-5; William Patterson Thirkfield, "Our Chance Next Door: The Opportunity That Offers After Revolution For Reconstruction In Mexico," *Outlook*, Jan. 12, 1921, pp. 57-60.

⁴² *Report of the Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Convention of the AFL*, 1922 (Washington, D.C., 1922), Resolutions No. 31, 103; *American Federationist*, March 1922, pp. 97-9. Gompers had been chiefly responsible for the creation of the Pan American Federation of Labor in 1918.

Mexico City, and Consul C. H. Donaldson at Torreón, Coahuila, and John Dyer at Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.⁴⁵ What else except admiration (or perhaps money) explains the case of special agent Major Joseph F. Cheston who voluntarily forwarded to Obregón a copy of the confidential report he made to the chief of staff in the War Department on his investigation of activities of certain American oil companies in Mexico during the summer of 1921.⁴⁶

In Washington the State Department encountered difficulty in its attempt to persuade as many governments as possible to cooperate with its policy of non-recognition.⁴⁷ Within many capitals domestic pressure for trade and investment proved to be stronger than principle. Only with the greatest reluctance did Great Britain and France comply with Hughes' request. Because Britain proved the more stalwart supporter of the United States, the financial agency of the Mexican Government in London, its consulates and Obregón's personal agents were the more active in propaganda among commercial and financial interests, the House of Commons and the Foreign Office.⁴⁸

A different situation faced Washington in the Western Hemisphere where the majority of Latin American states had recognized Obregón and several of their diplomats had expressed chilling remarks about American policy.⁴⁹ Concerned with the image of the United States and the sponsorship of Pan Americanism, former director of the Pan American Union, John Barnett, had sent out a questionnaire in January 1922 to approximately 200 outstanding statesmen, writers and editors in Central and South America. Nearly 90 per cent of the replies urged the immediate recognition of the Obregón government.⁵⁰ Although Harding was convinced that Barnett's findings correctly portrayed the sentiment of the Latin American countries, Hughes dismissed Barnett's question-

naire as propaganda.⁵¹ Hughes reasoned in similar manner as he did for the American public. Representative opinion in Latin America had been frequently and accurately informed of Washington's position, and most of this opinion, he asserted, was in favor of the State Department's point of view. The rest was adverse and unwarranted publicity.

Hughes was more responsive to rumors of "Bolshevik" tendencies in Mexico. Although the State Department publicly avoided any association between Obregón and Lenin, there appeared a similarity of problems in the granting of recognition to either government.⁵² Hughes maintained that he had always sympathized with the principles of the Mexican Revolution. But certain articles of the 1917 Consti-

⁴⁵ The following articles were from the *Nation* in 1921: Paul Hanna, "Relations with the United States," April 27, pp. 614-17; John Kenneth Turner, "Why the Obregón Government Has Not Been Recognized?", June 1, pp. 783-5; "Bullying Mexico," June 22, p. 864; "Our Menace to Mexico," July 20, p. 60; the *New Republic*, 1921: "Mexico: Prosperity First," June 22, pp. 95-6; "The Real Issue With Mexico," July 13, pp. 182-3; "Obregón's Opportunity," Aug. 3, pp. 255-6; Frederick Starr, "Obregón in Mexico," Nov. 2, pp. 293-5. See also Henry G. Alsberg, "Mexico: The Price of Recognition," *Nation*, May 10, 1922, pp. 561-2. The "International muckraking" was designed to increase sales at a time when prosperity undermined domestic protest; see Adler, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8.

⁴⁶ See his *Mexico And Its Heritage* (New York, 1928), and "Obregón, Bulwark of the Mexican Revolution," *Current History*, XXVII, No. 6 (September 1928), pp. 887-91.

⁴⁷ Consul General in Mexico City, Claude I. Dawson, to State Dept., May 9, 1923, NA, 123D711/143.

⁴⁸ Cheston's report of August 15 forwarded to Mexico City in November 1921, AGN, 104-P1-P-11.

⁴⁹ State Dept. to Chargé Summerlin, Aug. 4, 1921, NA, 711.12/350a.

⁵⁰ AGN, 242-A2-F; 104-R1-I-2 Pq 16; 104-R1-B1 Pq. 15-1.

⁵¹ Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Venezuela had not recognized Obregón by 1923. On criticism of U.S. policy see Memorandum of Matthew E. Hanna, chief of the Division of Mexican Affairs, to Hughes, April 7, 1922, NA, 812.00/26097; Summerlin to State Dept., Oct. 12, 1921, NA, 711.12/366.

⁵² Barnett to State Dept., Mar. 20, 1922, NA, 812.00/25508.

⁵³ Harding to Hughes, Hughes to Harding, Mar. 21, 1922, NA, 812.00/25494.

⁵⁴ Hanna Memorandum to Hughes, April 24, 1922, NA, 812.00/26097.

tution and the Department's interpretation of a country's international obligations seemed coincidental with a similar dispute involving Soviet Russia. The reports from the chargé d'affaires in Mexico City, George T. Summerlin, and the consul general, Claude I. Dawson, merely heightened this suspicion. Their dispatches warned of "radicalism" (without specifically describing it) and of an increasing anti-American sentiment.⁵³ Obregón casually used the threat of Bolshevism as a lever upon which to demand recognition. If his government fell, he warned, the United States was largely responsible for any dire consequences.⁵⁴

Another problem which taxed the State Department's patience was the existence of small anti-Obregón revolutionary bands which engaged in guerrilla activities along more than a thousand miles of border. Both countries cooperated in patrolling the border and in restraining these bands. Obregón, of course, pointed to a conspiracy to

forcibly overthrow him since non-recognition from the United States left his government insecure and relatively powerless. Special agents of the U. S. Department of Justice disputed Obregón's claim and asserted that the revolutionary activities and the widespread publicity given them along the border were deliberately exaggerated for propaganda purposes.⁵⁵ Whether they were exaggerated or not, Obregón hoped to capitalize on the factionalism and discontent which existed.

The diplomatic deadlock was finally broken as representatives from each country met in Mexico City during the late spring and summer of 1923. The Bucareli Conference, so named after the street of the meeting place, provided the basis for Obregón's recognition by August 31. Since the initiative for the conference came from Washington, it is important to consider at what point the State Department's stringent position melted and what factors led to the re-direction of policy.

A first consideration would be that Obregón's campaign had been effective in creating a chain reaction response of letters, resolutions, petitions, public addresses and editorials on behalf of his recognition. Business responded somewhat timidly in 1921, explaining its reluctance to offer the trade, investment, loans and credit necessary for Mexico's reconstruction on grounds of non-recognition.⁵⁶ One company, the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia, did take the unique and singular step of offering Obregón credit of \$2.5 million toward the purchase of new locomotives.⁵⁷

By 1922 chambers of commerce, manufacturers and exporters, bankers and financiers were openly complaining to Washington that their business relations with Mexico were handicapped by the State Department's policy.⁵⁸ Some prominent businessmen such as Chairman of the Board Elbert H. Gary of the U. S. Steel Corporation and President G. H. Gibson of the

⁵³ Dawson's superior considered that he was overreaching the duties of his post. Attached Memorandum from W. J. Carr to Hanna, June 28, 1922, NA, 812.00/25671. See Hanna's comments to Hughes, April 11, Oct. 27, 1922, NA, 812.00/26097, 812.636/1253.

⁵⁴ Such as was made by Obregón to Acting Military Attaché Colonel Miller, reported by Hanna, May 18, 1921, NA, 812.00/24991.

⁵⁵ Refer to reports made in 1922 by Special Agent Gus T. Jones to Attorney General H. M. Daugherty, found in General John J. Pershing Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 178. Pershing was then chief of staff of the U.S. Army. Jones' reports were confirmed by other agents, Harding Papers, Box 167. See also intelligence reports of the U.S. Army and of the Dept. of Justice, 1921-1922, found in AGN, 104-R1-L.

⁵⁶ *Sunset, the Pacific Monthly*, March, August, 1921, p. 15, p. 6; *System, the Magazine of Business*, October 1921, p. 401ff; *New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1921, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Edgar W. Turlington, *Mexico And Her Foreign Creditors* (New York, 1930), p. 173.

⁵⁸ Refer to letters in NA, Decimal File Group 711.12/. Several years later Hughes complained of telegrams that "fell like snowflakes in a thick storm"; Adler, *op. cit.*, p. 114. Obregón was conscious of this sentiment from the number of letters and literature forwarded by various businessmen; AGN, 104-R1-E-1, 2, 5, 9, 104-P1-P-8. A few American companies which had suffered serious personal or property losses in Mexico actively supported the State Department's firm policy; for example, the Oliver Trading Company to State Dept., July 21, 1922, NA, 711.12/448.

Chicago Steel Car Company gave addresses and interviews on changing conditions within Mexico which warranted Obregón's recognition.⁵⁹ The Tri-State Association of Credit Men, representing Texas, Arizona and New Mexico, was standardizing resolutions which credit associations in Indiana and Montana and several rubber companies with no affiliations in the Southwest were merely reproducing.⁶⁰ Following the lead of the American Federation of Labor, various State Federation of Labor and Trade and Labor Councils passed similar resolutions.⁶¹

Segments of the press in 1922 pressed the argument that any unrecognized government which had remained in power for more than a year, provided a minimum of internal peace and stability, and was willing to fulfill its international obligations satisfied any criteria for recognition.⁶² In the House of Representatives Thomas Connally, D-Tex., Meyer London, D-N.Y., and Carl Hayden, D-Ariz., praised Obregón as being the most capable leader in Mexico's history.⁶³ Opponents of recognition were limited to Rep. Claude Hudspeth, D-Tex., and Sen. William King, D-Utah.⁶⁴

A second indicator of change would be that by early summer of 1922 Hughes was becoming irritated by the frequent and harsh criticism of his policy. For the first time he publicly replied to what he regarded as inaccurate, misleading and malicious statements.⁶⁵ Hughes made a stinging retort to 10 questions directed at him by Ernest Gruening in one issue of the *Nation*,⁶⁶ and sharply rebutted a scathing address in the Senate on July 19 by Edwin F. Ladd, R-N.D.⁶⁷ Within nine days after Ladd's speech Hughes' next note to Mexico City suggested that the department's policy had perhaps been too narrowly construed and was inconsistent with the public sentiment. Withdrawing his demand for a specific treaty as a condition for recognition, Hughes left open to discussion the

format which would guarantee certain rights for American citizens in Mexico.⁶⁸ In an address in Boston on October 30 he repeated a statement similar to that delivered to Mexico City on July 28.⁶⁹

Finally as the autumn of 1922 approached, several incidents occurred which further embarrassed the department's policy and made Hughes more amenable to a compromise settlement. In November, protests against Washington's alleged interference in Mexican legislation rallied Mexicans and Latin Americans alike to defend Mexico's sovereignty and wounded national

⁵⁹ Judge Elbert Gary's comments rated a full first page in the Sunday feature section of the *New York Journal-American* (a Hearst paper) on March 31 and on April 9. Hanna to Hughes, April 10, 1922, NA, 812.00/26097; see the clippings in AGN, 104-R1-E-5 Pq 15-1.

⁶⁰ NA, Decimal File Group 711.12/ for 1922.

⁶¹ For example, those in the states of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Texas and California; AGN, 104-R1-E-15 Pq 16.

⁶² The survey of favorable newspaper editorial opinion in the *Literary Digest*, Sept. 17, 1921, pp. 11-12, had increased to a substantial proportion by the issue of April 8, 1922, p. 16. Periodicals in 1922 included *Century Magazine*, March and July, pp. 716-26, 373-84; *Nation*, May 10, pp. 561-2; *New Republic*, May 24, pp. 356-8; *Illustrated World*, August, p. 819ff; *Freeman*, Sept. 13, n.p.; *Current History*, September, pp. 1010-21; *Sunset*, the *Pacific Monthly*, January 1923, p. 52. The *Pan American Magazine* devoted its October issue to Mexico. Of the major periodicals only the *Independent* carried propaganda by the organizations which opposed Obregón's recognition.

⁶³ *Cong. Record*, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 23, 1922, pp. 2972-6; April 6, pp. 5125-6. In his report of Feb. 24, 1922 (NA, 711.12/394) Consul John W. Dyer at Cuidad Juarez, Chihuahua, was doubtful whether "a more stable government under any other leader [Obregón] would be possible in Mexico."

⁶⁴ *Cong. Record*, 67th Cong., 4th Sess., Dec. 11, 1922, pp. 323-7; 67th Cong., 1st Sess., Aug. 15, 1921, pp. 4989-90; 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., April 21, 1922, pp. 5795-5813.

⁶⁵ An analysis of Hughes' thinking and personality is provided in Glad, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7; p. 113; Vinson, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁶⁶ *Nation*, May 24, 1922, pp. 614-15.

⁶⁷ *Cong. Record*, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 19, 1922, pp. 10417-26; a pamphlet based on the speech was published in both English and Spanish. Hughes' statement to Harding, July 24, 1922, Harding Papers, Box 167.

⁶⁸ Hughes to Summerlin, July 28, 1922, *For. Rels.*, 1922, II, pp. 674-80.

⁶⁹ *International Conciliation*, No. 187 (June 1923), p. 29.

honor.⁷⁰ Although obviously fabricated by the regime, Hughes chose to drop the matter. Similarly, discrimination and assaults upon Mexican laborers in Texas and other states demonstrated an inconsistency in a policy based on the protection of the life and property of citizens abroad.⁷¹ Lastly, the problem of legal claims against Obregón's unrecognized government raised unanswered questions in two court cases.⁷² By February 1923 through the suggestion of an intermediary, Gen. J. A. Ryan (Ret.)—employee of the Texas (oil) Company and a personal friend of both Presidents—Hughes was willing to submit the issues pending between the two countries to a joint arbitral commission.⁷³

⁷⁰ Details are in *For. Rels.*, 1922, II, pp. 700-6; Harding Papers, Box 167; AGN, 731-A-11 (2).

⁷¹ "Mexican Rights in the United States," *Nation*, July 12, 1922, pp. 51-3. An editorial in the *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1922, sarcastically but truthfully pointed out that the United States would not have tolerated such outrages against American citizens in Mexico. Mention was made of the Mexican chargé d'affaires in Washington who listed between 50 and 60 Mexicans murdered in the United States during 1922.

⁷² *For. Rels.*, 1922, II, pp. 709-17; *For. Rels.*, 1923, II, pp. 571-2. The subject became a topic of examination by international lawyers. See Edwin Dickinson, "International Recognition and the National Courts," *Michigan Law Review*, XVIII, No. 6 (April 1920), pp. 531-5; XXI, No. 7 (May 1923), pp. 789-92. Other general problems related to national courts and unrecognized governments may be found in Dickinson, "The Unrecognized Government or State in English and American Law," *Michigan Law Review*, XXII, No. 1 (November 1923), pp. 29-45; XXII, No. 2 (December 1923), pp. 118-34; Edwin Borchard, "Can an Unrecognized Government Sue?," *Yale Law Journal*, XXXI, No. 5 (March 1922), pp. 534-7; Quincy Wright, "Suits Brought By Foreign States With Unrecognized Governments," *American Journal of International Law*, XVII, 1923, pp. 742-6.

⁷³ The Henry C. Beerliis Memorandum, "Relations With Mexico," Charles Evans Hughes Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 172, No. 37, p. 10; Hughes to Summerlin, Mar. 7, 1923, *For. Rels.*, 1923, II, p. 522. See also Trani, *op. cit.*, pp. 145, 148, note 31 on p. 191, who credits Harding with initiating the steps toward the conference.

⁷⁴ Hughes to Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, May 28, 1921, NA, 812.00/25010 1/2.

⁷⁵ As his administration progressed, Harding was maturing with new and varied experiences in office. See Jennings, *op. cit.*, 163-5.

⁷⁶ Harding to Under Secretary of State Henry P. Fletcher, Nov. 19, 1921, NA, 812.6363/1042 1/2.

⁷⁷ Harding to Attorney General Daugherty, April 6, 1922, Harding Papers, Box 167.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Hughes had definitely retreated from his dogmatic position formed in early 1921 when he had weighed more heavily the opinion of individuals opposed to Obregón's recognition: the views of those with considerable property interests in Mexico and acquainted with internal conditions for many years should not be neglected in any determination of policy.⁷⁴ By mid-1922 opinion for recognition was swaying in the opposite direction. While Hughes was annoyed at what he believed to be criticism of his integrity, he could neither deny the existence of a shift in opinion nor refute all logical arguments proposing Obregón's recognition.

Perhaps Hughes' dilemma was accentuated by Harding's growing perception of the problem.⁷⁵ He originally had entrusted foreign affairs to his secretary of state. While noting in late 1921 a reversal of position on the part of many American interests regarding Obregón's recognition, Harding still concurred in Hughes' recommendations.⁷⁶ The following spring Harding began to reveal some anxiety. The numerous relatively simple solutions being offered to Washington did not seem to consider, he remarked, the actual complexities involved.⁷⁷ But he showed his own uncertainty by the admission of tactlessness on the part of the United States in attempting to reach an understanding with Mexico.⁷⁸ Hughes' continued defense of his policy in the face of growing opposition may have caused Harding to ponder its utility. He could scarcely ignore letters, memoranda, resolutions and publicity sent to his office and to the State Department, especially when American business from credit associations to the U.S. Steel Corporation was demanding a reversal of policy. Congressional sentiment from both parties in state legislatures and in Washington was exerting notable political pressures.

Hughes probably would not have sacrificed principle for expediency

unless he was so pressured by Harding. Harding's suggestion in 1921 of a "special envoy" (and planned usage of Elmer Dover) was blocked by Hughes. By early 1923 Hughes readily accepted the intervention of General Ryan. The proceedings of the Bucareli Conference were examined and approved by Hughes in less than 48 hours, even though the American position had been considerably compromised.⁷⁹

Hughes was usually conspicuously diligent about the retention of memoranda on all aspects of the department's policies. The scanty or non-existent departmental records for the Bucareli Conference during the summer of 1923 indicated perhaps Hughes' increasing personal disinterest in the technicalities involved and an earnest desire to settle the Mexican problem as quickly and as quietly as possible. The commissioners had been in session since mid-May. Toward the end of July, Hughes almost apologetically remarked to Harding that the lengthy negotiations seemed "extraordinary" in view of what he believed to be reasonable and uncomplicated topics for discussion.⁸⁰ By the first week in August agreement had been reached and the proceedings ended.⁸¹

Whether or not the Mexican Foreign Office had spent nearly \$2 million as one source claimed on its propaganda campaign in the United States,⁸² its purpose was achieved. Hughes' legally formulated policy and his presuppositions concerning the necessity of an informed public and the deceptiveness of irresponsible propaganda gave way to Harding's weighing of evidence by the voluminous written

and spoken word of the "popular will."⁸³

A lengthy memorandum prepared in March 1923 by the chief of the Division of Mexican Affairs, Matthew E. Hanna, concluded that recognition could no longer be justifiably withheld from Obregón.⁸⁴ Not only would Washington reap political benefits from a permanent settlement of the Mexican problem but American interests in Mexico whether in business, oil or property would also be satisfied and the public relieved. What Hanna implied was that both Mexican nationalist Obregón and the American public had eventually triumphed.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Hughes to Summerlin, Aug. 22, 1923, NA, 711.12/1756.

⁸⁰ Hughes to Harding, July 23, 1923, Hughes Papers, Box 24.

⁸¹ Consult *Proceedings of the United States-Mexican Commission Convened at Mexico City, May 14, 1923* (Washington, D.C., 1925).

⁸² U.S. Consul General Dawson to State Dept., Jan. 29, 1923, NA, 812.20211/2. Although his figure quoted seems exaggerated, the sum spent on propaganda was probably extensive. Each of the Americans employed by Obregón, for example, received periodically or *in toto* an extravagant salary in payment for his services, ranging from several thousand to \$75,000. Refer to AGN, 104-R1-D Pq 15-1; 104-R1-S-6 Pq 16; 104-R1-E-8 Pq 16; 242-A1-M.

⁸³ Public opinion generally approved the Conference and Obregón's recognition. See a selected review of the press in *Literary Digest*, May 12, 1923, pp. 13-14; *New York Times*, April 25, p. 20. Less optimistic was the *Nation*, May 23, 587, pp. 589-91. For the outcome, see the synopsis of newspaper opinion in *Literary Digest*, Sept. 8, 15, 1923, pp. 14-15, p. 13; *Current Opinion*, October 1923, pp. 399-400; also *New York Times*, Sept. 2, 1923, II, p. 4; *Collier's*, Sept. 29, p. 7ff.

⁸⁴ Hanna to Hughes, Mar. 23, 1923, NA, 711.12/541; see also Summerlin's report, Feb. 10, 1923, NA, 812.00/26204.

⁸⁵ Recognition came none too soon as Obregón would have to weather a rebellion against his policies. In part the strong support of Washington and the American public enabled him to emerge victorious and to serve out his term of office until Nov. 30, 1924. Details are in Dulles, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-262.

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