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TIGHTENING THE REINS OF CONTROL OVER THE COUNTRY'S BORDERS: THE ROLE OF GOVERNOR RODOLFO SÁNCHEZ TABOADA IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *PLAN CARDENISTA* IN BAJA CALIFORNIA

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he various facets of the Plan Cardenista that were applied to the Territorio Norte de la Baja California during the sexenio from 1934-1940 not only marked a decisive step in the advancement of the area toward statehood, but also greatly strengthened its ties with the rest of the country.

The man who would become the federal government's chief instrument in the carrying out of these changes was Colonel Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada, a competent official in whom President Cárdenas placed his implicit trust and confidence with regard to implementing the federal plan for the region. As governor of the Territorio Norte de la Baja California for the major portion of the Cardenista period, Sánchez Taboada carried out his duties with zeal and dedication. By the end of the *sexenio*, he had largely put into effect the process of land reform and initiated the colonization projects that the federal government had planned for the region.

However, while historians have tended to view the period as a particularly successful example of the application of the Cardenista development measures to a regional setting, from the beginning these changes were fraught with certain problems

and difficulties. Far from being received by Baja Californians with open arms, the measures were instead met by opposition by diverse groups. As time went on, this opposition also became directed against the figure of the governor himself

This article has as its purpose that of examining governor Sánchez Taboada's role in carrying out the Cardenista plans for Baja California. It particularly focuses on those measures relating to land redistribution and colonization, as well as the sources of opposition that sprung up in the course of their implementation. I argue that, to a considerable extent, these arose from the opposition from some of the region's interest groups, who saw the government's measures as an imposition running counter to the will and benefit of the local inhabitants. Although the federal government was able to carry through its program with a considerable measure of success in terms of furthering the Territory's development, it required a period of adjustment for the region's inhabitants to adapt to the changes.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SÁNCHEZ TOBOADA'S TIES WITH CÁRDENAS

The designation of Sánchez Taboada as the principal public official charged with carrying out the most difficult phase of the Cardenista program in Baja California was owing largely to the personal esteem and confidence which Cárdenas had for his long-time military associate. It was also owing to certain similarities which they shared with regard to their respective backgrounds, as well their general outlook with regard to México's development and prospects.

Sánchez Taboada and Cárdenas were both born in the same year (1895) to families of humble origins. The father of Cárdenas was a green grocer of modest means in Jiquilpan, Michoacán. Sánchez Taboada, for his part, was from a rural middle class family that lived in the vicinity of Acatzingo, Puebla.

Cárdenas completed his elementary school education before taking a job at a print shop. Sánchez Taboada had the opportunity to further his studies somewhat by attending the Colegio de San José, the Hospicio de Puebla and the Colegio del Estado. The opportunity and experience which both men had of formal education instilled in them a life-long love of learning and an interest in promoting education. Sánchez Taboada, for example, always kept in his place of residence a library filled with books which he consulted continually. A gifted teacher and orator, he also contributed from his own money for the construction of schools in different regions. During his period as governor of Baja California (1937-1944), he founded several schools, including those which were located in the various *ejidos* created during his administration.¹

Both Cárdenas and Sánchez Taboada served as Constitutionalist officers in the revolutionary campaigns from 1910-1920. Due to their youth, they did not join the Revolution until the outbreak of the Carranza revolt in March 1913. During the campaign against Huerta, while Cárdenas fought under general Calles in Sonora, Sánchez Taboada served as a junior officer under the orders of general Fortunato Maycotte in northeastern Mexico. In November 1914, with the rank of *subteniente* (second lieutenant), Sánchez Taboada entered the Colegio Militar with the intention of becoming part of the *cuero médico* (medical corps). Following the rupture between the revolutionary forces that pledged allegiance to the Convention of Aguascalientes and those which remained loyal to Carranza, he campaigned with the Constitutionalist colonel Jesús Guajardo against the Zapatistas in the state of Morelos.²

¹ Milton Castellanos Everardo, *Del Grijalva al Colorado: recuerdos y vivencias de un político*, Mexicali, Secretaría de Educación Pública, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 1994, pp. 107 y 115.

² Marco Antonio Romero Arizpe, "Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada", *Fundadores*, núm. 4, 1997, pp. 1-4. When Cárdenas, after assuming the presidency, made Sánchez Taboada a key political appointee, the latter was able to prove, by way

In the 1920's, Sánchez Taboada continued to ascend in the army echelons. In October 1928, he was promoted to the rank of *mayor de caballería* (Cavalry Major).³ Throughout this period, which witnessed a number of revolts, both he and Cárdenas maintained their loyalty to the government in power. Although there are no references to relations between Sánchez Taboada and Cárdenas prior to the mid-1930's, when the former became a close military and political aid of the latter, it seems reasonable to assume that they were fairly well-acquainted with each other as officers of the federal army.

It was during the *gira electoral*, or electoral campaign, which Cárdenas undertook from early December 1932 to June 1934, that Sánchez Taboada came to form a part of the former's inner circle. Sánchez Taboada accompanied Cárdenas on his *recorridos* to certain areas, such as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as well as the northern states of Chihuahua, Durango, Sonora and the Territory of Baja California. It was during this period when Cárdenas came to know Sánchez Taboada more intimately and to realize that he could depend on him for the carrying out of certain tasks of a delicate nature.⁴

Following his election as president, Cárdenas later designated Sánchez Taboada head of the presidential *Oficina de Quejas* (Complaint Office). Not only did the latter become one of the president's key supporters, but the ties of esteem and affection

of documents, that he had not been involved in the assassination of Zapata. Lázaro Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1973, vol. 2, p. 598.

³ Promotion given to Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada, to a rank immediately above that of Cavalry Major, October 16, 1928, in Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter cited as AGN), Obregón-Calles, acuerdos 1200, in Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (hereafter cited as IIH, UABC), caja 10, exp. 61.

⁴ Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, 1973, p. 303; Cárdenas al general de brigada Manuel Ávila Camacho, subsecretario de Guerra, September 23, 1934, *Epistolario de Lázaro Cárdenas*, 2 vols., México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1974, p. 29; Castellanos Everardo, *Del Grijalva*, 1994, p. 107.

between the two men also became much stronger during this period. The two shared similar ideological inclinations and interests, particularly in the areas of agricultural development, education and sports (equitation).⁵

Thus, by the time that Cárdenas became ready to implement his government's package of reforms with regards to Baja California, to be discussed further on, Sánchez Taboada had come to be a trusted political and personal associate of the president.

INITIAL EFFORTS IN APPLYING THE CARDENISTA MEASURES TO BAJA CALIFORNIA

The first hints of the government's changes with regard to Baja California were contained in the *plan sexenal* (Six Year Plan), prepared during the Second Convention of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) held in Querétaro in December 1933, which had selected Cárdenas as the official party candidate. Among other things, the plan stressed the need for national integration and for strengthening the ties between the nation's interior and its more outlying, underdeveloped areas.⁶

The plan called for a major intervention on the part of the federal government in the economy in order to modernize the country's agricultural and industrial sectors. The government believed that agrarian reform and colonization were the key instrumentos towards revitalizing the peripheral regions and increasing their population. In January 1934,

⁵ AGN, acuerdos, October 16, 1928, Obregón-Calles, Acuerdos 1200, in IIH, UABC, caja 10, exp. 61; Cárdenas to general de brigada Manuel Ávila Camacho, subsecretario de Guerra y Marina, September 23, 1934, in Cárdenas, *Epistolario*, vol. 1, 1974, pp. 29-30; Castellanos Everardo, *Del Grijalva*, 1994, pp. 107 and 114-115.

⁶ Partido Nacional Revolucionario, (PNR) *La gira del general Lázaro Cárdenas*, México, Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Comisión Nacional del CEN, 1986, pp. 21-22, 181-186 y 204.

under the government of President Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932-1934), a separate Agrarian Department (Departamento Agrario) had been formed in order to centralize the process of land reform. Two months later, in March 1934, the Rodríguez government promulgated the Código Agrario (Agrarian Code), which defined and expanded the existing agricultural reform mechanism.⁷

Despite Sánchez Taboada's strong links to Cárdenas, he was not the president's first choice as the new regime's governor of the Territorio Norte. The first three men appointed to the position were in power for relatively short periods. As in the case of their predecessors, they possessed the dual functions of being both civilian governor and also military commander of the region. Although their governorships were beset with difficulties of one kind or another, collectively they served to provide the federal government with time to develop a more sophisticated strategy for implementing the *Plan Cardenista* in the region as well as providing it with some necessary tools for achieving that goal.

The first appointee, Gildardo Magaña Cerda, who relieved the outgoing governor —general Agustín Olachea Avilés— in early September 1935, was an ex-Zapatista general from Cárdenas's native state of Michoacán. The principal problem that Magaña had to confront on assuming office in Mexicali was to deal with the unrest, mainly in Tijuana, caused by Cárdenas' decree of January 1, 1935 specifying the closure of the casinos at the national level. As a result of his visit to Baja California during his *gira electoral*, Cárdenas had become convinced that the casinos acted as a severe obstacle to agrarian and industrial development in Baja California. The casino prohibition, which had thrown thousands of people out of work, constituted

⁷ *Código Agrario de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, México, Editorial Boetas, 1934; PNR, *Gira*, 1986, pp. 216-224.

a heavy blow to the regional economy.⁸ The Cárdenas government believed that many of these persons could find jobs in the agricultural sector; the majority however, had neither an agricultural background nor were inclined to do farming work. In an effort to provide some form of relief, Magaña instituted a public works program; however, given the severity of the depression, the measure offered only marginal relief.⁹

On a more positive note, the Magaña government witnessed the establishment, in October 1935, of the Comisión Mixta Intersecretarial, charged with the task of studying how the Cardenista policies could be implemented in the territory and to start the region back on the road to economic recovery. Before the year's end, the Comisión, composed of representatives from the Secretarías de Hacienda y Crédito Público, Economía Nacional, Agricultura y Fomento, Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, the Departamentos de Salubridad, Bosques, Caza and Pesca, as well as the territorial governor,¹⁰ had prepared several recommendations. The Commission's reports revealed the federal government's concern that the region's people were rapidly losing their own country's culture and becoming more and more like Americans. To remedy this problem, it recommended stimulating Mexican settlement in the region, especially with immigrants from the country's interior.¹¹

⁸ Over the next few years, there would be efforts to reopen gambling establishments in the region, until governor Sánchez Taboada finally repressed them in early April 1941. *The San Diego Union*, April 7, 1941, p. 1.

⁹ AGN, ingeniero Manuel Santillán, subsecretario de la Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento, November 7, 1935, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 437.1/413, in IHH, UABC, caja 6, exp. 25; Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, vol. 1, 1973, pp. 293 and 311; Lázaro Cárdenas, "Mensaje a la nación", December 9, 1938, *Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas*, 3 vols., México, Siglo XXI, 1978, vol. 1, p. 341.

¹⁰ AGN, José G. Parrés, subsecretario de Agricultura y Fomento, to Antonio G. Basich, Agencia de Fomento, Mexicali, October 26, 1935, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 437.1/413, in IHH, UABC, caja 6, exp. 25.

¹¹ AGN, Report of the Comisión Mixta Intersecretarial, December 23, 1935, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 437.1/413, in IHH, UABC, caja 6, exp. 25.

Another key suggestion of the Commission involved extending the *perímetros libres*—established during the Rodríguez administration—throughout Baja California, as well as the improvement of communication links between the region and the mainland. In this connection, it is important to stress the important groundwork established by President Rodríguez in conjunction with the development of the zone. A major reason why the Territorio became a focus of the Cardenista program was the fact that not only was Rodríguez particularly close to Cárdenas, but, during his period as governor of the entity (1923-1929), he had also contributed greatly to promoting the growth of agriculture, fishing and assorted industries in the area.¹²

At the beginning of 1936, Magaña left the governorship of Baja California to head the party candidacy for the same position in his native Michoacán. Cárdenas replaced him, in mid-February, with general Gabriel Gavira Castro, an ex-Carrancista officer and native of the Distrito Federal. Gavira knew nothing of the territory he was to administer, nor were the Bajacalifornians familiar with their new governor. Claiming that the government lacked funds, the new governor cancelled the public works program initiated by his predecessor, which brought on a storm of protests from labor groups. The fact that Gavira was an “outsider” also accentuated the demands for political autonomy.¹³

It was during the Gavira period that the federal government took the first steps towards dismantling the landholding empi-

¹² Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, vol. 4, 1973, pp. 15-18; Abelardo L. Rodríguez, *Memoria administrativa del gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927*, México, Secretaría de Educación Pública, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 1993, pp. 121-327; José Alfredo Gómez Estrada, *Gobiernos y casinos: el origen de la riqueza de Abelardo L. Rodríguez*, México, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Instituto Mora, 2002, pp. 114-152.

¹³ Marco Antonio Samaniego López, “El cardenismo en Ensenada: el establecimiento del Estado corporativo”, in Marco Antonio Samaniego López, (coord.) *Ensenada: nuevas aportaciones para su historia*, Mexicali, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 1999, pp. 642-644.

re of the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC) in the Mexicali Valley. The government considered this move to be the most essential part of its plan for promoting Mexican settlement in the Territorio Norte. On April 14, 1936, the CRLC signed a colonization contract with the Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento in which it agreed to sell to prospective colonists the remainder of its land in the valley. The government hoped thereby to provide colonists with parcels not exceeding 150 ha. for either agriculture or cattle-raising.¹⁴

The hope unleashed by the new federal policy accelerated the demand for the breakup of CRLC lands to form *ejidos*. Four Comités Agrarios (Agrarian committees) had been formed: Miguel Hidalgo, Guadalupe Victoria, Francisco Javier Mina and Michoacán de Ocampo, with residents in Ejido Hidalgo, Rancho Yamada, Estación Delta, Pueblo Nuevo and Colonia Pacífico. Other campesino groups joined these and the Federación de Comunidades Agrarias (or Federación Campesina) was soon established.¹⁵

Meanwhile, a delicate crisis had developed in the border region which forced a change at the gubernatorial helm. Former president Calles, who had been expelled from the country by Cárdenas in early April 1936, had taken up residence in nearby San Diego. Doubts concerning Gavira's loyalty, as well as his inability to deal with the situation in Baja California, caused Cárdenas to replace him, in mid-August of that year, with

¹⁴ Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California, (hereafter cited as AHE-BC) contract signed between the Colorado River Land Company and the federal government, as well as land sales effected between 1936 and 1945, in Mexicali, Baja California, oficialía Mayor, caja 49, exp. 852/671.24/3613, and exp. 852/67.24/ 3613; PNR, *Gira*, pp. 220-223 and 252-254; Dorothy Pearson Kerig, *El valle de Mexicali y la Colorado River Land Company, 1902-1946*, Mexicali, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, XVI Ayuntamiento de Mexicali, 2001, pp. 274-276.

¹⁵ AGN, Reports by Dionisio O. Mercado concerning the problems and progress of the colonization program in the Mexicali Valley, various dates, 1935-1937, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 534.3/41, in IIIH, UABC, caja 11, exp. 27.

general Rafael Navarro Cortina, who had played a major role in Calles's expulsion.¹⁶

Less than a month and a half later, on September 28, 1936, Cárdenas made a national radio announcement unveiling his master scheme—the Plan Pro-Territorios Federales—for the development of the territories of Baja California Norte, Baja California Sur and Quintana Roo. Acting in accordance with the suggestions of the Comisión Mixta Intersecretarial, Cárdenas stressed that the principal objectives of the plan consisted in substantially increasing the population of these regions, as well as improving communication links both within the territories and also with the rest of the Republic.¹⁷

In the meantime, however, the situation with regard to land redistribution had faltered. The government in Mexicali had made it known that it would initially distribute only 500 hs., or approximately 4 hs. per family. On January 27, 1937, in an event that came to be called the "*Asalto a las Tierras*" (Assault on the Lands), members of the campesino groups occupied several parcels of the CRLC's holdings, refusing to budge until their demands were met. Federal forces were dispatched to evict the occupiers and detain them in the Palacio de Gobierno building; in addition, several of the persons considered to be ringleaders were sent to the Islas Mariás penal colony off the coast of Sinaloa. In desperation, the campesino groups sent a commission to the capital to request Cárdenas's help in resolving the problem.¹⁸

¹⁶ Samaniego López, "El cardenismo", 1999, p. 644.

¹⁷ Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, vol. 1, 1973, p. 358; Lázaro Cárdenas, "Exposición del presidente de la República sobre la reconstrucción integral de los territorios de Baja California y Quintana Roo", September 28, 1936, *Palabras*, vol. 1, 1978, p. 215.

¹⁸ Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos del Estado de B.C., *Asalto a las tierras: datos históricos*, Acta levantada en la Colonia del Pacífico, el día 30 de enero de 1937, de los sucesos ocurridos los días 27, 28 y 29 de enero de 1937, Mexicali, XVII Congreso Estatal Ordinario, 1984, p. 7.

There were also problems in the western part of the territory, particularly in the Ensenada area. The campesinos, inspired by the agrarianism of the new government and its regional proponents such as Juan Julio Dunn Legaspy, the PNR leader in Ensenada as well as one of the town's most prominent citizens, began to agitate for land redistribution. In November 1936, for example, several of the smaller landholders in the Real del Castillo area brought suits against some of the larger *terratenientes* (landholders) in a dispute for possession of public lands.¹⁹

Although Navarro Cortina did not intervene in these land disputes, he did yield to pressure from the CROM and other groups for permission to open casinos in Tijuana and Ensenada. This prompted his removal by Cárdenas on February 22, 1937 and his replacement by Colonel Sánchez Taboada.²⁰

THE PLAN CARDENISTA UNDER SÁNCHEZ TABOADA

The immediate cause for the removal of Navarro Cortina had been the reopening of casinos in Baja California; nevertheless, Cárdenas and his chief advisers also felt the need to move more quickly on the implementation of the government's plans for the region. The president was confident that Sánchez Taboada, a senior army official who shared much of his own personal ideology and opinions, would be capable of carrying through these initiatives.

Although the new governor held the rank of general, he did not possess, as had his predecessors, military command of the

¹⁹ AGN, Juan Julio Dunn Legaspy to Governor Navarro Cortina, December 1936 (specific date not given), Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 509/21, in IIIH, UABC, caja 9, exp. 62.

²⁰ AGN, *nombramiento* (appointment) of Lieutenant Colonel Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada as governor of the Territorio Norte de la Baja California, February 22, 1937, Dirección General de Gobierno, serie 2.135 (30) 23543, caja 5, exp. 17, in IIIH, UABC, caja 14, exp. 47.

region. That was held by general Manuel J. Contreras, who was designated commander of the Segunda Zona Militar (Second Military Zone), with headquarters in Tijuana. This division of functions would allow Sánchez Taboada to concentrate on civil matters; it also had the advantage of making it appear to Baja Californians that their governor was more of a civil official, even though he was in fact a ranking colonel in the Mexican army.²¹

In addition, the governor also held the title of *Agente de Colonization* (Colonization Agent), charged with carrying out the federal government's plan for promoting settlement in the territory. Although the sale of lands by the CRLC was proceeding at a reasonable rate, the Cárdenas government desired to speed up the process of agrarian reform. It was interested in developing the totality of the Río Colorado delta region before the Americans could redistribute the river's water. It also wanted to build up the territorial population with Mexican immigrants either in the form of *repatriados* from the U.S. and other countries or immigrants from the more highly populated southern regions. In the process, it hoped to create a loyal campesino group that would help enable the State to strengthen its control over the region.²²

In mid-February 1937, the government sent Gabino Vázquez, director of the Departamento Agrario and a staunch *agrarista*, to the Territorio Norte with a team of engineers to investigate the region's problems and attempt to resolve them. Vázquez divided the Mexicali Valley into three administrative zones and assigned a group of engineers to carry out surveys in each. He also established a body called the Comisión Agraria

²¹ AGN, Silvestre Guerrero, secretario de Gobernación to the subsecretario de Guerra y Marina, February 22, 1937, Dirección General de Gobierno, serie 2.135 (30) 23543, caja 5, exp. 17, in IHH, UABC, caja 14, exp. 47.

²² Kerig, *El Valle*, 2001, pp. 277-279.

Mixta to process the various applications for the establishment of *ejidos*. The Comisión evaluated the feasibility of each application on the basis of the surveys carried out previously for that effect.²³

On March 14, Cárdenas decided to expropriate the lands of the foreign companies in the territory: that of the CRLC in the Mexicali Valley, San Isidro Ajolojol, in Tijuana, as well as Moreno and Compañía in Rosarito. From the redistributed lands of the CRLC alone, a total of 44 *ejidos* were established. In the course of the first year (1937), a total of 115,000 hs. were granted to campesinos for *ejido* use.²⁴ That same year the Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos (League of Agrarian Communities and Unions) was also established. This organization, which belonged to the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) formed by Cárdenas in June 1935, immediately began to play an important role in the territory's economic and agrarian affairs.²⁵

In order to increase the territory's population with immigrants, the government announced its intention to attract to the region considerable numbers of *repatriados* from the U.S.

²³ *The Calexico Chronicle*, February 25-26, 1937; *Periódico Oficial del Territorio Norte de la Baja California* (hereafter cited as *POTNBC*), February 28, 1937.

²⁴ The redistribution of the Colorado River Land Company landholdings would take more than a decade to complete. In March 1946, the federal government arranged for the Nacional Financiera to buy all of the company shares. A new corporation —the Compañía Mexicana de Terrenos del Río Colorado (Mexican Río Colorado Land Company)— was established with the task of selling parcels of land to Mexican colonists on the nation's behalf. The Compañía Mexicana was later dissolved in the early 1970's, once its task had terminated. AHEBC, generalidades de colonización, 1934-1958, oficialía Mayor, caja 49, exp. 852/671.24/3613; *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, México, D.F., March 22, 1948.

²⁵ Guillermo Gabino Vázquez Alfaro, *Testimonios de la acción agraria cardenista en el sexenio 1934-1940*, México, Editorial Pac, 1993, pp. 151-152; Pablo Herrera Carrillo, *Reconquista y colonización del valle de Mexicali y otros escritos paralelos*, México, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, XVII Ayuntamiento de Mexicali, Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, 2002, pp. 175-180.

One government official optimistically predicted that some 50,000 could be induced to settle in the region. It was thought that the latter could apply agricultural techniques learned in the U.S. to the business of farming in the territory.²⁶

In February 1935, the Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento announced that it would adopt measures for the settling of *repatriados* in Baja California. Studies were undertaken in order to assess conditions in the region and evaluate the possibilities for carrying out such a plan. The Comité Nacional de Repatriación set up a special fund of 101,000 pesos, which it deposited in the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola (BNCA) to be used for the purchase of lands in the area for this purpose.²⁷

Despite the efforts, the *repatriados* project was largely a failure. Territorial government officials doubted the region's capacity to provide enough jobs and resources to support the new arrivals. Many persons viewed the *repatriados* with suspicion due to the fact that they had lived in the U.S. for some time—in some cases years—; they also thought that their children no longer identified themselves either with Mexico or her culture.²⁸ Many *repatriados* did not stay in the border areas, but instead chose to rejoin their families in Mexico's interior, where there were also many more jobs and opportunities. Moreover, by the latter half of the 1930's, the worst effects of the Great Depression on the population of Mexican origin in the U.S. had largely passed. Consequently, the flow of Mexican migrants to Mexico had greatly diminished.²⁹

²⁶ PNR, *La gira*, 1986, pp. 74-75 and 253.

²⁷ AGN, Cárdenas to Sánchez Taboada, undated, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 503.11/3, in IHH, UABC, caja 8, exp. 35. See also *Excelsior*, Mexico City, April 13, December 11, 1935; *El Universal*, Mexico City, April 12, December 11, 1935; February 3, 1936.

²⁸ *El Universal*, July 29, 1937.

²⁹ Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, "La colonización de Baja California con mexicanos provenientes de Estados Unidos, 1935-1939", *Frontera Norte*, vol. 13, núm. 26, July-December 2001, pp. 148, 156 and 161.

In view of this situation, the Cárdenas government switched its emphasis from *repatriados* to Mexicans from the country's interior as potential colonists. This policy had the advantage of creating a source of manpower in an underpopulated zone, while at the same time satisfying the demands of peasants from areas in Mexico in which lands were scarce.³⁰

However, in addition to colonists from other regions of Mexico, some *repatriados* also joined the *ejidos* which were being formed in the Mexicali Valley. *Ejidos* established in other areas were composed exclusively of this type of immigrant. In 1939, for example, Sánchez Taboada obtained Cárdenas's approval for obtaining 30,000 pesos to finance the settlement of 20 families of *repatriados* from Santa Ana and Gardena, California, in Ejido Guadalupe. He also obtained 75,000 additional pesos for the establishment of 50 families from Los Angeles and Gardena in a settlement founded by general Ramón B. Arnáiz on lands located south of Ensenada.³¹

In addition, laborers who had arrived in the area to work on road construction projects also settled in the *ejidos*. The *ejidos* also contained residents of the entity who either did not possess lands or had lost them at some point. They also comprised members of the various indigenous groups in the region who had no other alternative but to adapt and become members of the *ejido* system.³² Hence, despite the government's aim of building up an agrarian population with *repatriados* and immigrants from southern México, the *ejido* groups ended up being fairly heterogeneous, with persons from a number of backgrounds.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

³¹ Arnáiz was director of the Peninsular Construction Company as well as president of the Committee Pro-Magaña in California. AGN, Sánchez Taboada to Cárdenas, July 28, October 12 and 15, 1939, April 1 and 18, 1940, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 503.11/3, in IHH, UABC, caja 8, exp. 28.

³² Samaniego López, "El cardenismo", 1999, pp. 662-677.

Overall, the Territory's agriculture and economy had made notable strides during this period, which were reflected in the region's demographics. While the 1930 census had registered a total of 48,327 inhabitants, that of 1940 gave a total of 78,907, just 1,093 short of the constitutional requirement to qualify for statehood.³³

OPPOSITION TO THE FEDERAL MEASURES

Despite the undeniable boost which the Cardenista measures had given to Baja California's development, they led to unrest among certain groups in the region. These were opposed to Sánchez Taboada and the government's policies, particularly in regards to the repatriation of Mexicans from the U.S. and the establishment of *ejidos*. As time went on, these sources of unrest became increasingly directed at Sánchez Taboada himself, eventually leading, as will be seen, to demands for his removal.

Business and commercial groups in the region criticized the Cardenista measures on the grounds, so they sustained, that there was no indication that they resulted in any growth in the number of companies and mercantile associations. In part, the economic stagnation was due to the effects of the depression, which created conditions in the region that were not conducive to investment. The critics made light of the fact that the Cárdenas government had made advances in stimulating commercial and economic development by establishing, in June 1937, a *zona libre* (free zone) in the principal urban areas of Mexicali, Tijuana, Ensenada and Tecate. In 1939, this area was extended to include the entire peninsula, as well as San Luis Río Colorado and the portion of the Colorado River delta situated in

³³ *Estadísticas históricas de México*, 2 vols., México, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática-Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1985, vol. 1, p. 5.

Sonora.³⁴ Be that as it may, the *empresarios* persisted in their belief that the government's policies did little to stimulate the regional economy. They believed that their economic interests lay largely beyond the border to the north; rather than with the rest of Mexico.³⁵

On several occasions, local members of the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), the Cámara de Comercio (Chamber of Commerce) and, in particular, ranchers of the region, denounced the Cardenista land policies in the belief that the newcomers were ousting them from their lands. In part, their opposition derived from an instinctive reaction against the arrival of immigrants from other regions, even though the latter were Mexicans. The Russian colonists of Guadalupe Valley near Ensenada also found themselves having to fend off attempts by campesinos from other regions of Mexico to establish themselves on lands they claimed as their own.³⁶

As in the case of former governors, some Bajacalifornians criticized the fact that Sánchez Taboada was not a native of the territory. In late December 1938, when the latter had been in office only about a year and a half, the labor union "Igualdad, Paz y Trabajo" sent a memorandum to Cárdenas recommending that he be replaced, upon the expiration of his term—which it claimed would be in 1939—, by general Juan Domínguez Cota, a native of the Territorio Sur de la Baja California. The union charged that, during his administration, Sánchez Taboada had largely abandoned public services and road construction in the territory. It claimed that Domínguez Cota's period of government in the Territorio Sur had, on the other hand, been noted for its achievements in these areas. The veracity of this as-

³⁴ *POTNBC*, June 30, 1937; AGN, Cárdenas to the Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, July 14, 1939, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 564.1/26, in IIIH, UABC, caja 16, exp. 3.

³⁵ Samaniego López, "El cardenismo", 1999, pp. 645, 647-648 and 653.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 639, 645 and 667-668.

sersion was questionable, since other sources indicate that the lack of social and economic reforms were primarily responsible for Domínguez Cota's removal and replacement with colonel Rafael Pedrajo, formerly director of Transit in the Distrito Federal. Nevertheless, in view of Sánchez Taboada's success in implementing federal policies in the territory, Cárdenas had no desire to derail the government's projects by his removal.³⁷

Charges of corruption were also levelled against the governor. Previous *jefes políticos* and governors, such as Manuel Gordillo Escudero and Esteban Cantú, had faced similar accusations, particularly in connection with government regulations and the sale of permits for the vice industries (cantinas, gambling and houses of prostitution). In an article published in April 1939 in the Baja California newspaper *El Regional*, its editors asserted that Sánchez Taboada's predecessor, Navarro Cortina, had been removed from power because he had stopped sending 1,000 pesos monthly payments to an unidentified person in the central government. They claimed that Sánchez Taboada had recently shipped two railroad car loads of purebred horses to the capital. Claiming that the governor could not have afforded the purchase of these animals on his salary, the only other possibility, they pointed out, was that they had been given to the governor by unspecified persons in exchange for exemptions or concessions for business operations. They also maintained that his government had paid little heed to the clandestine existence of opium dens and gaming houses in the territory. The government turned a blind eye to these activities, they asserted, because they received money in exchange for their silence.³⁸

A year and a half previously, Sánchez Taboada had sent to Cárdenas five horses that had been given to him by the owners

³⁷ AGN, memorandum sent to Cárdenas by the Union "Igualdad, Paz y Trabajo", December 28, 1938, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 544.2/2, in IHH, UABC, caja 12, exp. 27.

³⁸ AGN, Agustín Leñero to Ignacio García Téllez, Secretario de Gobernación, April 12, 1939, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 544.2/2, in IHH, UABC, caja 12, exp. 27.

of the Hipódromo de Tijuana (Tijuana racetrack). The governor justified his action by claiming that he had shipped the animals in question —Percheron studs— to help improve this particular breed of horses in the country's central region.³⁹

Despite Sanchez Taboada's attempts to justify this type of action, it did not serve in any way to counteract the charges of corruption and criticism against his government. Although Manuel Avila Camacho, who succeeded Cárdenas as president in December 1940, retained Sánchez Taboada as governor of Baja California —mainly due to the fact that the latter had supported his candidacy for the presidency—, such incidents would continue to occur until the end of his governorship in 1944.⁴⁰

THE NON-ENCOURAGEMENT OF FOREIGN SETTLERS

As seen, the chief thrust of the Cardenista colonization program for Baja California consisted of increasing its population, principally with Mexicans. The government did not actively seek settlers from other countries.⁴¹ In a meeting with reporters in Tepecoacuilco, Guerrero, in April 1937, Cárdenas declared:

Mexico should not colonize any region of the country with foreign elements, as long as the quality of life, not only of the indigenous peoples, but also the mestizos themselves, is only not equal but inferior to that of the colonizers. Experience has demonstrated that the colonist despises the native and, either eliminates him or uses him for his own economic ends. This situation impedes

³⁹ AGN, Sánchez Taboada to Cárdenas, October 27, 1937, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 506.25/15, in IHH, UABC, caja 9, exp. 52.

⁴⁰ *The San Diego Union*, July 11, 1941, p. 10; August 3, 1944, p. 4.

⁴¹ Gilberto Loyo, "La política demográfica del Plan Sexenal" en *La política demográfica de México*, México, Instituto de Estudios Sociales, Políticos y Económicos del Partido Nacional Revolucionario, 1935, pp. 14 y 23.

the healthy mixing of the races and any understanding that they must work, united, for the benefit of the region or the country as a whole.⁴²

This emphasis on Mexican colonization led to some misunderstanding from non-Mexicans who were anxious to migrate to the territory or promote schemes involving the colonization of lands in the peninsula by foreigners. However, in view of the considerable problems Mexico had experienced in the past with foreign colonization companies in the region, as well as the attacks by filibuster expeditions beginning with William Walker's foray in the early 1850's, its stance on this question is comprehensible.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Zionist groups had searched for possible areas for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. Among the regions considered, one of the most promising appeared to be Baja California owing to the smallness of its population as well as the success achieved with regards to the settlement of Russian Molokans, a religious group, in the Guadalupe Valley area in the northern part of the peninsula. Nevertheless, despite the receptive attitude of presidents Obregón and Calles with regard to proposals for Jewish immigration and the establishment of Jewish colonies in Mexico in the early 1920's, the plans came to naught.⁴³

Although antisemitism rose to the fore in Mexico as a result of strong xenophobic currents in the late 1920's and early 30's, the official attitude toward Jewish immigration became somewhat more relaxed during the Cárdenas administration.

⁴² Declaraciones del Presidente de la República a los periodistas, Tepic-coacuilco, Guerrero, 17 de abril de 1937, *Palabras*, vol. 1, 1978, p. 245 (Author's translation).

⁴³ Harry S. Linfield, "A Survey of the Year 5685", in *American Jewish Year Book*, Philadelphia, American Jewish Committee, vol. 27, 1925, pp. 67-68; Norton B. Stern, *Baja California Jewish Refuge and Homeland*, Los Angeles, Dawson's Book Shop, 1973, pp. 19 and 54-56.

Not only was the Cárdenas government more radical than the previous administrations, but it also repudiated Nazism and its racial policies. Antisemitist attacks against the Jewish population continued; nevertheless, the Cárdenas government permitted hundreds of Jews seeking asylum from Nazi persecution to settle in Mexico.⁴⁴

In the autumn of 1938, as a result of the Jewish diaspora provoked by the Nazi persecutions in Europe, Baja California was once again considered as a place of refuge. One of the chief proponents of the plan was the San Diegan merchant and real estate developer Hyman S. Wolf. Wolf was not only an active member of the international Zionist movement, but had also participated in the establishment of the incipient Jewish settlement in Palestine.⁴⁵ In comparing the latter with Baja California, Wolf commented:

If the proposal should become a reality, Jews could accomplish more in Lower California than even the great things they have accomplished in Tel Aviv and other Jewish settlements in Palestine.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *The New York Times*, "Anti-Semitic Drive Gaining in Mexico", December 3, 1937, p. 14; Alicia Gojman Goldberg de Backal, "Ashkenazitas y sefarditas frente a la xenofobia de los años treinta en México", en Delia Salazar Anaya (coord.) *Xenofobia y xenofilia en la historia de México, siglos XIX y XX: homenaje a Moisés González Navarro*, México, Secretaría de Gobernación, Instituto Nacional de Migración, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, DGE Ediciones, 2006, pp. 327-334; Judit Bokser Liwerant, "El México de los años treinta: cardenismo, inmigración judía y antisemitismo" en Salazar Anaya, *Xenofobia*, pp. 387-392.

⁴⁵ *The Yoval, the Jubilee Book, Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of Lasker Lodge No. 370, B'nai B'rith*, San Diego, California, B'nai B'rith, Independent Order of Lasker Lodge No. 370, 1937, pp. 25, 30, 53 and 56-58; Hyman S. Wolf, "Palestine As I Saw It", *Southwestern Jewish Press*, pp. 9, 13 and 16, taken from http://www.jewishlightseeing.com/louis_rose-historical/honorees/wolf_hyman-articles/1946-04-18-palestine_as_I_saw_it.htm.

⁴⁶ *The San Diego Union*, W.B. France, "Will Lower California Become Another Promised Land, Flowing with Milk, Honey?", November 23, 1938, p. 1.

When news of the proposal reached the Baja California authorities and the general public, considerable discussion was aroused.⁴⁷ As the Los Angeles journal *B'nai B'rith Messenger*, in its edition of November 18, 1938, put it,

[...] No one, apparently, had bothered to ask the Mexican government—or the Mexican farmers who happened to live on the soil—what they thought of the idea...[When] the Mexican farmers in Lower California heard about it, [they] became panicky at the thought that they would become dispossessed...⁴⁸

The following day, on November 19, 1938, Sánchez Taboada, in an interview with the press, called the scheme a “fantastic dream”. The governor made it clear that Mexico was not interested in such a proposal and, moreover, would be prepared to take up arms to prevent any such project materializing:

The Mexican government is not willing to cede or sell any part of its national territory, even if it takes every citizen to defend its integrity.⁴⁹

The government's policy with regard to the attempted establishment of a Jewish colony in Baja California was not the result of antisemitism, even though, as seen, currents of anti-Jewish feeling did exist in Mexico, especially in the northwest. In the main, it stemmed from a wish—justified in the light of earlier experiences with foreign incursions—to avoid the es-

⁴⁷ ¡Alerta!...a toda la nación mexicana! Los judíos quieren apoderarse de Baja California”, *Revista Minerva*, Mexicali, December 1938-January 1939, fondo Pablo Herrera Carrillo (hereafter cited as FPHC), in IHH, UABC, caja 4, exp. 27, hs. 1645-1646; Pablo Herrera Carrillo, “El judío errante en Baja California”, s.f., FPHC, in IHH, UABC, caja 4, exp. 72.

⁴⁸ Nayer Tomid [pseud.], “Food for Thinkers”, *B'nai B'rith Messenger*, November 18, 1938, quoted in Stern, *Baja California*, 1973, p. 66.

⁴⁹ *The New York Times*, November 20, 1938, p. 34, and *The San Diego Union*, November 20, 1938, p. 1.

tablishment of whole colonies of foreign settlers, especially in the border regions. It may also have been influenced by the opinions of Gilberto Bosques, Mexico's consul general in France, who advised Cárdenas that the establishment of Jewish agricultural colonies would not prove viable. The Jews, Bosques commented, were more inclined to work in activities connected with commerce and industry; they also had a tendency to “close up shop and return to their country of origin”.⁵⁰

An exception to the government's policy regarding foreign colonists was made in the case of Republican refugees from the Spanish Civil War. During that conflict, the Cárdenas government aided the Republican cause in terms of international diplomacy, as well as with the sale of small arms, foodstuffs and other materials. It also made it known that it would accept, in the event of a defeat, any Republicans who might wish to immigrate to Mexico. In all, approximately 25,000 Spanish refugees migrated to México, many of these during the Second World War.⁵¹

Owing to the similarities of language and culture between the Spanish and Mexican peoples, Cárdenas believed that it would be easier for this type of foreign immigrant to blend in with the Mexican population. With the possible exception of the Díaz government, previous administrations had been somewhat cool towards proposals for the encouragement of migrants from Spain, the colonial power that had governed Mexico prior to her Independence. Cárdenas's move in this regard marked a distinct change in governmental policy towards immigrants from the former mother country.⁵²

A small number of the Spanish refugees, some of whom were doctors, lawyers and other professionals, chose to settle in Ti-

⁵⁰ Gilberto Bosques, *Gilberto Bosques: Historia oral de la diplomacia mexicana*, México, Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, 1988, p. 52.

⁵¹ Cárdenas, *Apuntes*, vol. 1, 1973, pp. 354 and 372; Pere Foix, *Cárdenas*, México, Trillas, 1976, pp. 231-270.

⁵² AGN, Cárdenas to Sánchez Taboada, undated, Lázaro Cárdenas, exp. 503.11/3, in IHH, UABC, caja 8, exp. 35; Foix, *Cárdenas*, p. 252; PNR, *Gira*, p. 252.

juana and, to a lesser extent, in Mexicali and Ensenada. In order to improve Baja California's educational institutions, Sánchez Taboada made a particular request to Cárdenas to induce some of the teachers among the refugees who had recently arrived in Mexico to settle in the region. Those who chose to do so—among whom were such distinguished academics as Laureano Sánchez Gallego, Miguel Bargalló Ardévol and Aurelio Magro—helped to establish, in 1939, the Instituto Técnico Industrial de Agua Caliente, as well as other educational institutions in the region.⁵³

The Spanish refugee immigrants who settled in Baja California constituted a small, but important influx of foreign immigrants into the region during this period. It was an example of the Cardenista preference for immigration from "Latin" countries, in the belief that it was this type of foreign immigrant that could best blend in with the Mexican population as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS

Sánchez Taboada became the central figure in the implementation of the Plan Cardenista for Baja California mainly as a result of the close relationship which he had developed with Cárdenas during the period of the *gira electoral* of 1934. In part, it was also owing to the basic harmony of interests and outlook of the two with regard to what the Cárdenas government wished to accomplish both at the national level and with specific regard to Baja California.

When Sánchez Taboada took office as governor of the Territory, the inhabitants of the region had already spent two years coping with the changes introduced by the Cárdenas govern-

⁵³ *El Universal*, August 12, 1939; *El Herald*, Tijuana, Baja California, February 12, 1944, pp. A-1 and A-6.

ment, beginning with the closure of the casinos. The two basic initiatives for carrying out the land redistribution and colonization plans—the creation of the Comisión Mixta Intersecretarial and the commencement of the dismantling of the CRLC—had already occurred prior to Sánchez Taboada's arrival in Baja California. Thus much of the groundwork had already been done and his task largely consisted of overseeing the implementation of the government's measures in the territory.

The unrest which occurred after Sánchez Taboada took office as governor stemmed from a variety of complaints. One of these, as noted, was the inclination of the commercial and business groups to view their future prospects as lying to the north, with San Diego and the rest of California, rather than with the Mexican mainland as envisioned by the Cárdenas government. Their uneasiness with regards to the arrival of *repatriados* and Mexican immigrants from the south was owing their fear that the newcomers would occupy lands that would otherwise be available to them. As time went on, the criticisms against the federal government's policies became increasingly directed against Sánchez Taboada himself.

One aspect of the colonization program for Baja California in which the opinions of the federal government and the local inhabitants largely coincided was with regard to the inconvenience of opening the territory up to settlement by foreigners. Given the problems that the region and the country had experienced in the past with regard to proposals to purchase the peninsula or portions of it, as well as foreign incursions that had attempted to take it by force, the prospect of establishing a Jewish homeland in the region was foredoomed to collapse. The idea of fugitives from the Spanish Civil War settling in the region, however, proved more palatable, as it was considered that members from this particular ethnic group—given the cultural similarities with Mexicans—would integrate more easily with the local population and contribute to its well-being. ☺

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