I. Circumstances

The circumstances surrounding *Sinarquismo* are the archaisms and the imbalances that existed in Mexico under Cardenas, disorders prevalent in rural areas for the preceding 25 years; countrywide economic problems, above all agrarian; socio-political problems, in particular the consequences of the religious conflict and, finally, the 'fascistization' of the middle classes. All this took place during the presidential succession of 1940 which reveals a fantastic increase in right-wing forces.

In Mexico, 70% rural and deeply affected by the conflict between the Church and the State, a unique encounter took place between the peasant masses and the townspeople, between the young people of the 'new strata' (to avoid using the term 'middle class'), the craftsmen, and the workers belonging to the old trades, all of whom were susceptible to the ideology of the U.N.S. (Unión Nacional Sinarquista).

The Mexican Government, characterized by its authoritarian democracy, is a strong one which recognizes in the U.N.S. a potentially subversive and revolutionary organization, employing nationalist, organic and unitary ideas, which the official party sought to monopolize (the R.M.). The U.N.S. is idealistic, populist, anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist like the homologous movements in Hungary and in Rumania during the thirties. The *Legion of the Archangel Michael* in Rumania combines social Christianity, agrarianism and traditionalism with hatred of the democratic, communist and Jewish 'foreigners'. The legionary's oath says: "We want to live a hard and strict life, rejecting all luxury

and dissolute living. We want to suppress any attempt by man to exploit man. We want to devote ourselves to the fatherland for always'. The U.N.S. can also be compared to the agrarian parties of Eastern Europe from 1919 to 1949, to the Brazilian Integralismo, to Salazarism, to the Italian *Uomo Qualunque* of 1944-1946 and to Argentinian Peronism with which it kept up a correspondence. The U.N.S. was relatively free to play an extremist role, free to make untenable promises, free to attract the public from the 'leftwing' movements, made possible by the absence of a revolutionary Left, by the fact that, under Cardenas, the Left was integrated and committed to the Government. The revolutionary opposition thus was monopolized by the U.N.S.

II. Strategy and tactics

Three possible strategies can be noted: 1) suspicious isolationism, withdrawal on a village and rural basis; 2) revolutionary combat, preferred by Abascal\(^1\), but impossible without the support of the army at least; or 3) compromise, the search for the government's support for effective pressure.

The U.N.S. broke down due to its inability to choose between the 2nd. and 3rd. strategies, an inability that was manifest in the conflict between the "Base"\(^2\) and the U.N.S. It took refuge in strategy No. 1, from where it could one day eventually be rescued. *Tactics*: The legal steps corresponding to the institution list and legalistic spirit of the movement; these are accompanied by the infiltration and the lobbying in the Ministries of Agriculture, Interior, and in the military. The doors were never closed and the national leaders, from Zermeño to Torres Bueno, were received by President Cardenas and by President Avila Camacho.

Agitation and propaganda belong to the field of direct action which is basically non-violent. This non-violence, in which numerous millenar-

\(^1\) Salvador Abascal, national leader from 1940-1941, removed from the leadership following Pearl Harbor because his radicalism worried the Americans. He embodied the hard wing of the movement with his millenarian and Apocalyptical inclinations and real fascist potentiality.

\(^2\) The "Base": secret organization which manipulated the UNS until 1944. In close contact with the Mexican Government, the American Embassy and the Catholic Hierarchy. Dreams of a Mexican *Opus Dei*. 
ian elements can be found, is not synonymous with inactivity. It includes and canalizes disciplined aggression, which always makes a strong impression on observers. Tactically, this non-violence corresponds to a dialectic of waiting and of action which is essential for the movement; it is also revealing, it proclaims the essence of the movement, a movement of the poorest of Mexicans who transfer the role of the pariah to the level of national politics. The U.N.S., a political pariah, identifies itself with Mexico, a pariah nation, that has to free itself from the United States. All the strategies of civic resistance (going to prison, not paying fines, etc...) are deeply rooted in these pariah ethics, which at the same time were characterized by a reverence towards power — there is a desire to 'kiss the ground beneath it', and as long as the opportunity is given, this is done with haste and with joy.

The result is a political style which combines steadfastness with respect. In 1941, at the time of greatest severity, the U.N.S. gave the following instructions to its leaders:

Suppress anything that may be offensive from our vocabulary... do not attack the authorities. We support the authorities who make it a rule to seek the common good. We desire harmony between the people and the Government, we are not a blind and narrow-minded opposition.

But, the U.N.S. continues by proclaiming that “we do not want fine speeches, Mr. President, we want justice” and fills the streets with its demonstrators. This type of action is essential in order to mobilize, recruit ('sinarquize'), train and maintain the troops in good order, in order to be noticed by the Government.

Before 1946, the U.N.S. did not once stand in an electoral campaign. Its reasoning was well-founded on the uselessness of the vote; the attempt of the Fuerza Popular in the autumn of 1946 merely shows that times had changed and that the U.N.S. was on the decline. As the possibilities of lobbying were limited (the U.N.S. had only a few allies in the system; people were too afraid of it), direct action and the mobilization of the crowd constituted the essential part of the Sinarquist political game that the Government accepted and manipulated with its police and militia. Who tackled the Sinarquists? Who took the bottom out of their movement? The agrarian sector and the police, never the army, the only political sector in the government system which sympathized with the U.N.S.

Failure or success depends on the strategical context.
III. Strategical context

The forms of attack and the intensity of the Sinarquist movement—the use of non-violence, the elimination of the radicals, its decline—were conditioned and practically determined by the strategical context, that is to say, the constellation formed by the institutions, groups, and individuals, whose interests were at stake, their strength, their alliances and opposition, the political and legal rules which governed the conflict and its solution in Mexico: the United States, the war in Europe, and then after Pearl Harbour, World War II, all belong to the strategical context. In view of the configuration of forces, it is evident that:

The Sinarquists had very little economic and political power; they never received serious financial help from the Mexican landed classes nor from abroad, in contrast to the P.A.N., for example, which is financed by Mexican industrialists and bankers. Socially, the Sinarquists recruited from the middle classes, the craftsmen and especially from the peasant classes. The peasant, within the context of agrarian reform, was an ideal subject for Government manipulation, likewise by the U.N.S. As a result, the U.N.S. itself was manipulated and on a threefold basis at that—

1) by the "Base", a secret organization, representing the interests of the conservative Catholic sector who wanted to convert the U.N.S. into a pressure group on the Government (in short, strategically the same as the P.A.N.).

2) by President Avila Camacho's Government that used the U.N.S., while controlling it, in order to destroy the Left and to dismantle the positions of Cardenas' followers.

3) by the United States, who thus continued with the consolidation of Avila Camacho's regime in order to prevent a return to Cardenist practices, and with the struggle against the implantation of a fifth column in Mexico. Its intervention in 1941 in the elimination of Abascal is decisive.

At all three levels of manipulation, the 'Base' was represented by Antonio Santa Cruz, a rich Catholic businessman. The U.N.S. was fighting for reforms, and for power, although it did not say so. For tactical reasons, the U.N.S. declared that it did not want to become involved in politics, but the permanent conflict between the 'Base', that did not want a takeover, but nevertheless wanted to exercise its influence, and the successive leaders of the U.N.S., from Zermeño to Torres Bueno, is proof of his ambition. At local level, this is evident, and at national
level, it can be seen in the foundation of the Fuerza Popular, a short-lived party.

The success of the U.N.S. was certain. To be able to exist within the Mexican political system, especially during the period of domestic crisis (1937-1941) and international crisis (after 1940) to be able to demonstrate in the streets, in itself constituted an exploit. This success was due to the capacity of the U.N.S. (and that of the 'Base') to check and to control its radical groups and its troops, to bring about a compromise between the Government and the United States. This explains why the Government sold paper to the newspaper “El Sinarquista” and combined tolerance at national level with a bloody repression at local level up until 1941. After the elimination of Abascal, and after achieving the consolidation of the Government in regard to Cardenism, the repression of Sinarquism did not involve any more martyrs. But, each time that the Sinarquists raised their voices or marched too quickly, they got their knuckles rapped (1944).

So they had to find a compromise between the political interests of the movement, those of the Government and those of the United States, which could not be threatened. This explains the internal crisis in the U.N.S. which had a vast audience among the people because it spoke out against the Government and the United States; it also explains the contradiction that existed between the U.N.S.’s daily activism and its long-term inactivity. ‘Floating in too great a myth, they fly ahead of it, hurrying into action, marching, singing, and getting agitated just for the sake of it, their words and gestures often masking the powerlessness or abandonment of their ideal, but at the same time used as rites capable of producing powerful symbols, sources of energy and renewal’. 3

Once Abascal, who would have undoubtedly led the movement to a take-over and thus clarified the position (by the probable destruction of the U.N.S. or by its alliance with other rightwing forces, mainly military), had been eliminated, there was nothing left other than untenable promises. For the time being, they could economize on action, and content themselves with waiting patiently, in the exaltation of individual purity, and in adventism, consoling themselves with local activity (moralizing, cleanliness and literacy campaigns. . .). Then, the leaders of

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the U.N.S. split up, relations with the ‘Base’ were broken off and the masses grew weary. A handful of unshakeables is all that remained

The U.N.S. worked in international and national political circles. The rise of fascism in the world, and especially the nationalist triumph in Spain gave it a boost, but this only lasted until Pearl Harbor; afterwards, it needed to make a stand against Italy and Germany to protect itself from the fatal accusation of fascism. Within Mexico, the U.N.S. participated in the general rise of emotions and anti-Cardenist forces before 1940; then it became the ally of Avila Camacho in the flight against Cardenism, and after the defeat of the latter, with the coming of Miguel Aleman as President, the U.N.S. loses its “raison d’être”.

IV. Nature of the U.N.S.

The easy tag of fascism has been attached to very different movements. This does not mean to say, and it is what sometimes makes it difficult to understand Sinarquism, that the U.N.S. was not affected by fascism. The methods and the outward signs of fascism are not everything, and the Mexico of 1940 was very far from the capitalist societies of the period of monopolist concentration and imperialism; the Mexican ‘bourgeoisie’, if there is such a thing, was more on the side of President Avila Camacho than on that of the U.N.S. If fascism is supposed to stem from the democratic bourgeoisie, in an atmosphere of serious economic crisis and against a powerful proletariat, there is nothing of this kind in Mexico. All the same, the political system is not undergoing a crisis; the crisis of the presidential succession in the summer of 1940 did not affect the system, even if it was advantageous to Sinarquism. There is no revolutionary threat from the Left and the State has become the central economic and political agent in Mexico to such an extent that no one even talks of a take-over.

Neither the economy (the situation has been bad for years, but not catastrophic), nor the State, nor capitalism is undergoing a crisis. This is why there is no one to finance the U.N.S., a movement of the poor, the remains of the incorruptible sort, why it is not a matter of the U.N.S. taking over the State, but of the State using the U.N.S. Things might have been different had Múgica succeeded Cardenas in 1940; then money would have flowed in to the treasury. The U.N.S. was there to help make the famous but “inexplicable” swing of the Mexican Revolution in 1940.
The support of Santacruz or that of a few other rich men is not the cause of the striking growth of the U.N.S. The members of the P.R.U.N., of the Dorados, of the P.A.N., etc... have far more money. The reason is to be found in the logic of a situation which, in a society frightened by Cardenism, seemed to have to reinforce right-wing radicalism, more especially as leftwing radicalism had begun to lose its hold among the masses, while at the same time knowing how to give the impression that it was above the other parties. The U.N.S.’s awareness of this situation undoubtedly explains in part its extraordinary activity which had no equal. This still does not, however, indicate the type of combat and the type of simplification that should be chosen by this activist and still pliable right-wing radicalism. Abascal was eliminated because he was a terrible simplifier, and he might have led the U.N.S. to a truly conflictive type of fascism. The U.N.S. reached its peak under his leadership, then began its decline. At that precise moment, what it needed was to take power or to be asked to rule. It did not find a partner, because neither the State nor the propertied classes were threatened. As for the numerical strength, a Bergery said to La Rocque, who was so proud of the large numbers in his “Croix de Feu”, ‘you still do not equal the number of gas suscribers’.

Today, in 1976, in the Third World, there are movements that seek to combine nationalism, socialism and populism, using a mystic-mystifying language. Their ideology usually corresponds to a nationalist-populist, opportunist and progressive dictatorship that aims for economic growth and promises national independence and social justice. For a long time the Mexican political system was familiar with this type of language, used simultaneously by the Government and by an opposition movement, the U.N.S., whose brilliant and rapid trajectory showed the richness and fragility of certain social movements.

In the U.N.S, as was somewhat the case with Italian fascism, the forces at play were the conservatives and the national-populists, both from the political Catholic circle. They spoke different languages and were from two different institutions:

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4 400,000 members, a million sympathizers and daily presence in the streets.

5 French nationalist right-wing movement of the thirties.
1) The conservative "base", which played a double game with the peasants, with the Sinarquists, and with the United States, and
2) The U.N.S., which strictly speaking embodied a peculiar type of revolutionary reaction. The "Base" was looking for the key to the masses. The U.N.S. had already found it, but thanks to the "Base".

So, until 1944, paternalistic and authoritarian leaders of the old style (Santa Cruz) and leaders of contemporary movements, who violently attack liberalism, democracy and an unjust economic system co-existed. The difference between the conservatives and the rebels was social, the former often belonging to the ancient oligarchy, sometimes to the new, the latter belonging to the middle classes. The difference is also biological —a whole generation existed between the the two. The young leaders angrily and violently attacked the historical (Cardenist) Left and its class war, but not its social aims. They managed to recruit members from the so-called leftist groups — students, workers, industrialists, poor peasants and Indians. The ideological salmagundi, made up of a glorious past, present action and future advantages, was successful because of its very confusion. On the other hand, the Salazarian Catholicism of the "Base" did not leave room for the authoritarianism of the anti-traditional masses. The Sinarquist leaders were the leaders of a great movement of the poor, who are always the losers in socio-economic changes. Their ideology was suited to a time when any kind of change was better than none, when feverish activity acted as a substitute for efficiency.

The U.N.S. proved that peasants and workers could accept such an ideology. Stemming from university circles (young lawyers from Guanajuato), it was spread by the young nationalists who could not see anything in the litanies of so conformist a Left, and who could not find a place in the system. This ideology first took root in the historical heart of Mexico, in the highly-populated agrarian areas of the Bajío, and in the Indian communities overwhelmed by extreme poverty, and then among the workers.

This is how this vast movement appeared. It was the bearer of radical claims, dreaded as such, even by some of its members, and considered as such by the Government, in a country where nationalism is equivalent to anti-communism.

In its biggest statistical dimension, the U.N.S. was agrarian, but it also worked as a "revolution" of the middle classes, as a reappearance of that which history had repressed (Catholics excluded from political life) or lacked (agrarian reform). It is a movement of all classes.
V. Failure or success?

The U.N.S. is a fine example of the power and of the stability of the Mexican political system, a fine example of the control of the peasants by means of manipulation and by means of an opposition organization that is "loyal" in its own way. The U.N.S. was the first to assert its role as demobilizer during mobilization. It rightly affirmed that it had prevented many bloody riots and more than one uprising. It boasted of having quelled the last seeds of the Cristero uprising, notably in the Acámbaro region (Guanajuato), where it forced the remaining dissidents to lay down their arms, from 1940-1941. It channelled the discontent of the peasants, allowing them to express themselves and to make themselves understood by the Government.

The U.N.S. rendered an excellent service to the Mexican authoritarian democracy by integrating the rural masses, deprived of their traditional restraints (the landowners and the clergy) by the agrarian reform and anti-clericalism (since 1914, the Church has formed part of the opposition), into the system. The U.N.S. wanted to be, and in fact was, the first "democratic" movement of the masses (demos) in Mexico, a factor of modernization and integration in a political life dominated by an extremely limited ruling class. The U.N.S. was thus a political feat proper to the century of the masses, that of the passing from carlo-populism to contemporary right-wing national populism during which time the radical potential had been diffused. The U.N.S. did not take power, but it did fulfill its historical mission of controlling the peasant masses, of representing the "fascist" psychodrama, and finally of facilitating the slide to the right of the Mexican Revolution. As Padre Heriberto Navarreta said, quoting some lines from El Cid:

"Sinarquismo? Goodness, what a good servant, had it had a good master!"

"El Sinarquismo? ¡Dios que buen vasallo si hubiese tenido buen señor!."