

8.2. FAMILY: THE FIRST LADY'S MEMORIES OF THE OIL EXPROPRIATION

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What can I say about the magnitude of emotion concerning the expropriation of oil? It has been written and talked about so much, there are so many testimonials by people who were involved in this national act. The general [*President Lázaro Cárdenas*] told me, "Cutie, I believe you should call on Women and encourage their participation in this moment in which the presence of all Mexicans is urgently needed. In a national call, work is necessary in the schools and in the families." So a collection was called for to pay the cost of expropriation. This was rather symbolic help, but, how beautiful was the response!

Immediately, we began to have talks to make plans and decided the collection would take place in Bellas Artes. Badges were made with the national symbol that we all proudly wore.

The wives of all the government officials, as well as of trade unions, women's associations, friends, everybody were invited. All the time, we were receiving the people who came; everyone was quick to adapt to the place and in turn formed groups. There has not been a response more beautiful than that. They arrived with animals, chickens and sheep, money, jewelry, wedding rings, baptism medals, distinct objects, miniatures, everything. The presence of the people was unique. It was very exciting, people were very motivated, wanting to help with nothing more than what they were carrying, but they would like to have done more, I don't know that they could have collaborated more. The children gave their piggy banks. I've seen evidence in the Bank of Mexico that children were given a receipt for their contributions. Cuauhtémoc and his friends went to give their little pigs that they had as banks.

These were days of much activity and great satisfaction. The generosity and quality of the people expressed in every form as they responded to this Act that marked forever our economic sovereignty.

The night of March 18, between 11 and 12 at night, the general asked me to wake up Cuauhtémoc and bring him down to the office to take a photograph. Even half asleep and leaning against the furniture, he appeared with his papa, with me, and some of the secretaries and assistants.

Twenty-five years after the expropriation, friends of the General wanted to give him a gift that consisted of a car and a driver. On finding out, he said to Pedro Ledezma, who had headed up the idea: "Give me something that I can give to the people." He first thought of building material to aid a school, creating a kindergarten, but in the end, there was so much that could be done. And, in those days, with the help of my in-laws, there had been opened the first sewing room in Jiquilpan and hence was born the decision to give sewing machines. So this had raised the car up at 350 sewing machines.

These were given to schools and were installed in particular so that poor people, with a desire to learn to sew, would have that opportunity. After classes ended in schools in the evenings, mothers could go to take cutting class and so they could make clothes with ease. Some sewing machines went to Jiquilpan, others to different places and the last ones were delivered in the Mixteca.³