

## Vidaurri, Juárez and Comonfort's Return from Exile

RAY F. BROUSSARD\*

THE MEXICAN revolution of Ayutla, which toppled Antonio López de Santa Anna from power for good in August 1855 after a quarter century of influence, also raised to the presidency another leader who was to play a central part in the drama of Mexican history for half a decade. This was Ignacio Comonfort, a man relatively well known in government circles for his honesty, integrity, and efficient administration, but with little public acclaim. It was Comonfort's leadership of the revolutionary armies and his political strategy in uniting all factions against Santa Anna which made him a popular hero.<sup>1</sup> After the revolution, the first provisional president was Juan Álvarez, hero of the War for Independence and titular leader of the Ayutla revolution. Álvarez soon tired of his official responsibilities, however, and retired to his estates in the southern mountains of Guerrero, after appointing Comonfort, his second-in-command, as substitute president in December 1855.<sup>2</sup>

Once in office, Comonfort faced the problem of extremism. On one hand, the Conservatives, furious at the attacks on their special privileges in the Ley Juárez and on church property in the Ley Lerdo, refused to support him and repeatedly attempted to overthrow the government by force. The resources sorely needed to rehabilitate the country after the long years of civil war, had to be spent to quell the recurrent uprisings.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Comonfort also had to con-

\* The author is Associate Professor of History at the University of Georgia. The research for this study was financed in part by a grant from the American Philosophical Society.

<sup>1</sup> Felipe Tena Ramírez, "Comonfort, los moderados y la Revolución de Ayutla," in Mario de la Cueva *et al.*, *Plan de Ayutla* (México, 1954), 298-299; Ray F. Broussard, "Mocedades de Comonfort," *Historia Mexicana*, XIII (January-March, 1964), 379-393.

<sup>2</sup> Clyde Bushnell, "The Military and Political Career of Juan Alvarez, 1790-1867," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1958), 305-306; Juan Álvarez to Lucas de Palacio y Magarola, México, December 8, 1855, in Comonfort papers, folder 17, Latin American Collection, University of Texas Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>3</sup> *Ley Juárez* in Jorge Tamayo (ed.), *Benito Juárez: Documentos discursos y correspondencia* (2 vols., México, [n.d.]), II, 98-115.

tend with the opposition of the Puros or extreme Liberals, a small but vocal minority dominating the Constituent Congress which was trying to draft a constitution and review the acts of the provisional government. To the Puros the deliberate action of Comonfort's government was little better than the Conservative obstructionism, and they seized upon every occasion to abuse the president.<sup>4</sup>

How could Comonfort have survived two years of the presidency under these circumstances? The answer lies with the moderates of both sides. Tired of war, revolution, false promises, and violence, they gave their allegiance to a man who seemed able to smooth over differences rather than create them, a man who promised to give the nation peace and progress rather than discord and stagnation.<sup>5</sup> For a year, while the Congress drafted and polished the Constitution of 1857, Comonfort held the country on an even keel—no simple task, for during that time he had to put down three formidable Conservative revolts and two Liberal uprisings. Finally in February 1857 the long-awaited constitution was completed. It came as a tremendous shock to the Conservatives, who refused to accept it and boycotted the elections for which it provided. With no opposition to speak of, Comonfort was elected constitutional president in August 1857.<sup>6</sup>

It was soon evident, however, that the constitution would hamper the effectiveness of his administration, for it placed all traditional Liberal restrictions upon the power of a strong executive. Conservatives, sensing the weakness of the heretofore powerful leader, waited until the constitution went into effect and moved in for the kill. Plots, mutinies, and uprisings broke out everywhere.<sup>7</sup> Faced with what appeared to be a full-scale Conservative revolt, the president asked for emergency powers, which Congress voted grudgingly for a short period. This did not satisfy him, and a little later he proposed amendments to the constitution which would have strengthened his position. The Liberal-dominated Congress shuddered in horror and rejected this bid for greater executive powers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Francisco Zarco, *Historia del Congreso Extraordinario Constituyente, 1856-1857* (México, 1956) for the debates of the deputies.

<sup>5</sup> Ignacio Comonfort, "Política del General Comonfort," in Anselmo de la Portilla, *Méjico en 1856 y 1857* (New York, 1858), 303-306.

<sup>6</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Joaquín Moreno, México, February 18, 1857; Certificate of election of Ignacio Comonfort, both in Comonfort papers, folder 17; *Siglo XIX*, September 17, 1857.

<sup>7</sup> Portilla, *Méjico en 1856 y 1857*, 253-274.

<sup>8</sup> Niceto de Zamacois, *Historia de Méjico, desde sus tiempos mas remotos. . .* (22 vols., México, 1878-1902), XIV, 493-494; Manuel Dublán and José María Lozano, *Legislación mexicana o colección completa de las disposiciones expedidas*

At this point many moderates were already urging Comonfort to bypass the harassments of Congress and lead a coup against the constitution so that he could return to provisional rule. On December 17, 1858, the Mexico City garrison actually staged such a coup, and he succumbed to the pressure. Two days later, convinced that he was supporting a moderate coup, Comonfort signed the Plan of Tacubaya, which made him a provisional president once more. But the Tacubaya coup was merely a façade for the Conservatives, and their cheers of triumph at his decision to overthrow the Constitution of 1857 alarmed many moderates. Therefore they withdrew their support and joined the extreme Liberals in opposition to the new provisional regime.<sup>9</sup>

The end came swiftly, for as soon as the Conservatives realized that Comonfort had no intention of abandoning his program for moderate reform and annulling the Ley Lerdo and the Ley Juárez, they led a counter coup against him early in 1858. After a short period of fighting in Mexico City Comonfort was defeated and ousted. He went into exile with the bitter jeers of both Liberals and Conservatives echoing in his ears, reviled by the same people who had cheered his triumphal entry into Mexico City two years earlier.<sup>10</sup> With Comonfort's moderating force gone, Mexican politics became polarized. Liberals, uniting under the banner of the Constitution of 1857, and Conservatives with their battle cry of "religión y fueros" could now engage in the blood bath known as the War of Reform.

Though blamed by both sides for the war, Comonfort was confident that he had acted wisely and with the best interest of the nation in mind. The failure of his plans was no reflection on his good intentions. At Jalapa, on his way into exile, he drew up a letter to the people of Mexico, dated February 2, 1858, in which he attempted to explain his actions.<sup>11</sup> He was leaving, he said, so as not to cause any

*desde la independencia de la república* (10 vols., México, 1877), VIII, 644-645; Felipe Buenrostro, *Historia del primer Congreso Constitucional de la República Mexicana que funcionó en el año de 1857* (2 vols., México, 1874), I, 235-236; Portilla, *Méjico en 1856 y 1857*, 274-279, 285.

<sup>9</sup> Manuel Payno, *Memoria sobre la revolución de diciembre de 1857 y enero de 1858* (México, 1860), 8-26, 59-62, 83-84, 89-96, 100-104; *Siglo XIX*, December 17, 1857; Portilla, *Méjico en 1856 y 1857*, 292-293, 297, 300-303, 306; Comonfort, "Política del General Comonfort," 837-839.

<sup>10</sup> Payno, *Memoria*, 107-113; Description of the events of January 20, 1858, in Comonfort Papers, folder 17; Melchor Álvarez, *Historia documentada de la vida pública del Gral. José Justo Álvarez, o la verdad sobre algunos acontecimientos de importancia de la guerra de reforma* (México, 1905), 67, 70-74; *Siglo XIX*, January 21, 1858.

<sup>11</sup> "General Comonfort a la nación," Jalapa, February 2, 1858, *La Sociedad*, February 10, 1858.

disunity among the constitutionalist forces. He did not wish potential supporters of the Liberal cause to hold back from it because of personal loyalty to him. He expected to be held responsible for his actions during his term of office, and he would return to face trial. In closing, he denied feeling hatred or resentment for anyone.<sup>12</sup>

As he boarded ship at Veracruz, Comonfort did not dream that his period of exile would last four years. He imagined that after a short period conditions would become more settled, and he could clear his name. For this reason he immediately began to prepare his defense in the form of a pamphlet published in New York during the summer of 1858.<sup>13</sup> In this apologia he saw himself as the unfortunate victim of circumstances. He claimed to support reform, but also characterized himself as a moderate who favored a more gradual and evolutionary process of change than the radical moves desired by his more vociferous Liberal colleagues. Planning to rely upon men of good will who were also moderates, Comonfort had expected to create a following among them to counteract the divisive effects of extreme Liberals and extreme Conservatives. In this manner he would avoid the fratricidal war inevitable if either group of extremists gained control of the country. Unfortunately, he had misjudged the political situation, overestimating his support, and by this gross error he had actually precipitated the conditions leading to the War of the Reform.<sup>14</sup>

Comonfort's determination to return to his homeland apparently persuaded him to move from New York to New Orleans in the spring of 1859. The Liberals in Veracruz were holding onto the city with difficulty, though besieged by Miguel Miramón, the brilliant Conservative leader. The United States had recognized the government of President Benito Juárez, sending a naval squadron and Minister Robert M. McLane to the temporary capital. As a result communications between New Orleans and Veracruz were good.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after his arrival in New Orleans, Comonfort wrote President Juárez and offered his services to the constitutional government as an experienced military commander. The president, whom Comonfort had imprisoned for a short time in January 1858 for refusal to support the Plan of Tacubaya, apparently mistrusted his

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Comonfort, "Política del General Comonfort."

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Robert M. McLane to Lewis Cass, Veracruz, April 7, 1859, in William R. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs; 1851-1860* (12 vols., Washington, 1937), 1037-1044.

motives and refused to accept his services.<sup>16</sup> Juárez's reply plunged Comonfort into despair, and he immediately left for a European tour to forget his sorrow, spending the remainder of the year in England, France, and Germany.<sup>17</sup> In January 1860 he returned to the United States, and after a brief visit with his daughters, who were enrolled in a New York school, he returned to New Orleans to live the leisurely life of the political exile while awaiting the propitious moment to return home.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile in Mexico the tide had finally turned for the Liberal cause, and a new general, Jesús González Ortega, began to win victories for the forces of the constitutional government. Increasing successes, culminating in the brilliant victory of Calpulalpan, enabled President Juárez and other officials of his government to stage a triumphant entry into Mexico City on January 11, 1861.<sup>19</sup> Even before this Juárez called for a new election, since terms for officials elected in 1857 had ended. In the ensuing campaign his supporters were victorious by an overwhelming majority over relatively weak opposition. It is interesting to note that in some quarters Comonfort's name was proposed as a possible candidate, although it was never actually entered on the ballot.<sup>20</sup>

With all dangers to the constitutional regime removed and a new Congress convening in Mexico City, Comonfort apparently felt that the time had come to clear his name. Writing to the newly-elected Congress in April 1861, he offered to return to Mexico and stand public trial before that body. In asking for his day in court, he suggested that he would present sound reasons for his resignation and explain why, in his opinion, it should have been construed as only temporary. He promised to resign the presidency when the trial was over, even if acquitted, but he wished to be tried as president.<sup>21</sup>

The letter caused considerable commotion in Congress when it

<sup>16</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela Comonfort, New Orleans, March 25, 1859, Comonfort papers, folder 23B; Ignacio Comonfort to Gobernador de Nuevo León y Coahuila, Mier y Terán, Río Salado, July 25, 1861, *Siglo XIX*, August 26, 1861.

<sup>17</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela Comonfort, London, July 29, 1859, Comonfort papers, folder 23B.

<sup>18</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela Comonfort, New Orleans, April 19, 1860, Comonfort papers, folder 23B.

<sup>19</sup> Benito Juárez to Santiago Vidaurri, México, January 12, 1861, Jorge Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario de Benito Juárez* (México, 1957), 129; Ernesto de la Torre Villar, *El triunfo de la república liberal, 1857-1860* (México, 1960), 267-269.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Burke Ulick, *A Life of Benito Juárez: Constitutional President of Mexico* (London, 1894), 109, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Felipe Buenrostro, *Historia del segundo Congreso Constitucional* (2 vols., México, 1874), I, 23-31.

was presented on May 11. After speeches of indignation the deputies absolutely refused to consider the proposal. Instead the extreme Liberal members shouted through a resolution declaring that Comonfort had ceased to be president as of December 17, 1857, the day on which the Plan of Tacubaya was announced, even though he had not openly declared his support of the plan until two days later. An amendment offered by a few moderate supporters of the ex-president, attempting to change the date to December 19, 1857, was voted down.<sup>22</sup>

With all opportunities for legal reentry apparently closed to him, the exiled president began implementing what probably had been his alternate plan in the event that his pleas to Congress were denied. Either directly or through mutual friends or agents he was in constant touch with Mexicans passing through New Orleans.<sup>23</sup> Through them he made contact with the caudillo of the North, Santiago Vidaurri, who was at this time in disagreement with the central government.<sup>24</sup> Secure and semiautonomous in his northern citadel of Monterrey, Vidaurri could, if he chose, provide Comonfort with the security and protection necessary for a return to favor.

The relationship between these two men had begun in the late summer of 1855, when Comonfort, the leader of the victorious Revolution of Ayutla, succeeded through letters in persuading Vidaurri, the leader of the Northern Revolutionary Movement, to join him and present a united front against the forces of conservatism and dictatorship. The two men continued an intimate private correspondence throughout Comonfort's presidential administration, with only a brief interruption in 1856, when Vidaurri was at odds with the national government.<sup>25</sup>

Although no records exist of correspondence between the two men during Comonfort's period of exile, it is reasonable to assume that there must have been occasional contact of some sort, for in Vidaurri's letters to national officials there are references to statements made by Comonfort. Evidently Vidaurri arranged for Comonfort to come to Nuevo León and gave him permission to live there.<sup>26</sup> Obviously

<sup>22</sup> Dublán and Lozano, *Legislación mexicana*, IX, 217; *Siglo XIX*, June 13, 1861.

<sup>23</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela Comonfort, New Orleans, May 17, 1860, Comonfort papers, folder 23B.

<sup>24</sup> Benito Juárez to Santiago Vidaurri, México, May 4, 1861, in Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario Juárez*, 134-136.

<sup>25</sup> Santiago Vidaurri to Ignacio Comonfort, Monterrey, September 6, 1855, Archivo General del Estado, Monterrey, N. L. (hereafter cited as AGE); Edward H. Mosley, "The Public Career of Santiago Vidaurri, 1855-1858" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1963), 220-237.

<sup>26</sup> Santiago Vidaurri to Benito Juárez, Monterrey, July 4, 1861, in Santiago

in the first step of an agreed plan, Comonfort sent for his family and journeyed with them from New Orleans to Brownsville, Texas, late in June 1861.

Meanwhile, Vidaurri began to prepare the way for the arrival of his friend. In a letter to President Juárez early in July, he casually mentioned that Comonfort was planning to return to Mexican territory because of failing health and also because he was having financial difficulties. The governor of Nuevo León recommended that the ex-president be allowed to live peacefully in the north, where he would not engage in politics. As Vidaurri put it, Comonfort wanted only "una palma de tierra en su patria." The governor also pointed out that because of the Civil War in the United States, Comonfort feared for the safety of his family there.<sup>27</sup>

Apparently no effort was made to keep secret the arrival of the Comonfort party in Brownsville, for several prominent citizens of Matamoros crossed the river to visit him. During these meetings Comonfort was very grave and reserved, refusing to be drawn into discussions of Mexican politics. The news of his arrival spread, and rumors swept across Mexico that the former president intended to return and only awaited permission from the national government to reenter the country.<sup>28</sup>

Mexican Liberals did not greet the news of Comonfort's proposed return with enthusiasm, for the bitter memories of the recent war which they blamed upon him, were too vivid to be easily set aside. Rather, they demanded that he be tried for treason against the Constitution of 1857. Juan José de la Garza, governor of the state of Tamaulipas, made plans to arrest the ex-president in the event that he should attempt to cross the river into Mexican territory. Therefore Comonfort decided to leave Brownsville, travel upriver to Laredo, and cross into Mexico there.<sup>29</sup> Since travel conditions in the desert of South Texas were difficult, this journey was to be made without his daughters, who entered Mexico at Matamoros and went on to Monterrey. There they were welcomed upon arrival and installed in the home of Patricio Milner, Vidaurri's son-in-law.<sup>30</sup>

Roel (ed.), *Correspondencia particular de Santiago Vidaurri gobernador de Nuevo León* (Monterrey, 1946), I, 73-74; *Siglo XIX*, July 21, 24, August 16, 1861.

<sup>27</sup> Vidaurri to Juárez, Monterrey, July 4, 1861, in Roel (ed.), *Correspondencia de Santiago Vidaurri*, I, 72-73.

<sup>28</sup> *Siglo XIX*, June 16, July 21, August 2, 1861.

<sup>29</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela Comonfort, Lampazos, July 26, 1861, Comonfort papers, folder 23B; Comonfort to Vidaurri, Laredo, Texas, July 21, 1861, Vidaurri correspondence, AGE, leg. 86; *Siglo XIX*, August 7, 1861.

<sup>30</sup> *Siglo XIX*, August 7, 1861.

Transferring from one border city to another, however, did not eliminate Comonfort's problems. This time danger came from General Guadalupe García, the commander of the northern frontier. Shortly after he left Brownsville, the ex-president was almost captured when a contingent of about forty men from García's command made a sudden crossing of the Rio Grande. For the remainder of his journey to Laredo this party watchfully followed him from across the river.<sup>31</sup>

While Comonfort was dodging García's patrols in the south Texas desert, he was the object of considerable attention and concern in Mexico City. On July 15, just as he was leaving Brownsville, a letter from Vidaurri to President Juárez arrived in the capital. The *caudillo* of the North casually mentioned in the course of the letter that he had granted Comonfort permission to enter Mexico and live peacefully in Monterrey. Publication of the letter caused a furor in the Liberal press, which demanded government action to guarantee that the villain who had caused the War of the Reform would not go unpunished. In view of the public reaction, President Juárez called a special cabinet meeting to discuss the situation. It was agreed to send a special order to Vidaurri, commanding him to arrest Comonfort and send him to Mexico City for trial. The Liberal press showed obvious relief at the decree, since Vidaurri's credentials as a Liberal had never been questioned, and everyone assumed that the order would be carried out.<sup>32</sup>

Comonfort was thus presented with a dilemma upon his arrival in Laredo. If he crossed the river, he faced arrest by García's cavalry troop. If he eluded García, he would still have to deal with Juárez' order for his arrest. Comonfort decided to attempt a clandestine entry. One of his party, John Clark, went directly to Monterrey with information about the difficulties encountered and the change of entry plans. Then, accompanied by his faithful travelling companion, Lauro Benavides, the ex-president slipped away from Laredo and journeyed still farther up the river in search of a suitable place to cross into Mexico.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela Comonfort, Lampazos, July 26, 1861, Comonfort papers, folder 23B.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Allen Smart, *Viva Juárez! A Biography* (Philadelphia, 1963), 215; *Siglo XIX*, July 30, August 1, 16, 1861; José Manuel Puig Casauranc, *Archivo de Juárez*, I, 299; Ministro de Gobierno to Gobernador del Estado de Nuevo León y Coahuila, México, July 20, 1861, *Siglo XIX*, August 16, 1861.

<sup>33</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela and Clara Comonfort, Lampazos, July 26, 1861, Comonfort papers, folder 23B; Comonfort to Vidaurri, Laredo, Texas, July 21, 1861, AGE.



A day's journey upriver from Laredo was the hacienda La Pita, owned by Benavides; here Comonfort hoped that his party could slip across. Their absence from Laredo was discovered by García's men, however, and once more the escort accompanied them upriver. Refusing to give up, Comonfort and his party followed the Rio Grande seven leagues further until they arrived at a point where a small portion of the state of Nuevo León touched the river and García's authority did not extend. There was no ford, however, and strong currents prevented swimming. After failing to make a bridge out of tree trunks, several members of the party took boards from the ruins of an abandoned house and constructed a small skiff. In this leaky craft the former president of Mexico crossed the Rio Grande into his native land.<sup>34</sup>

Once across, Comonfort and his companions still had to avoid detection, for García's men had violated the international boundary in trying to surprise him near Brownsville. Instead of using the main road, therefore, they travelled across the desert and spent the night in the open. The next day, using the mountains as guides, they started south to meet Vidaurri.<sup>35</sup> The party reached the Salado River at the point which had been previously arranged as a rendezvous, but Vidaurri was not there. Apparently the changes in timetable had thrown him off schedule, for the governor of Nuevo León did not join his distinguished guest until the following day, when Comonfort and his weary companions arrived in Lampazos, the site of Vidaurri's ranch.<sup>36</sup> The encounter could scarcely have been called a reunion for Comonfort and Vidaurri had met face to face only once before during a short series of conferences in Mexico City in the summer of 1857. The two men were true friends, however, as attested by their voluminous correspondence, which averaged several letters a month.<sup>37</sup>

Slow communications, often a hindrance to governmental efficiency during his days as president, now came to Comonfort's aid. The presidential decree ordering his arrest arrived in Monterrey after Vidaurri had already left on vacation and was received instead by Domingo Martínez, the acting governor during Vidaurri's absence. Not being privy to the governor's plans, Martínez could honestly though inaccurately report to the Minister of the Interior on July 28 that Comonfort was not in the state. He further assured the of-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Adela Comonfort, Lampazos, July 26, 27, 28, 1861, Comonfort papers, folder 23B.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Vidaurri correspondence, AGE.

ficials in Mexico City that should the ex-president arrive, the order for his arrest would be obeyed.<sup>38</sup>

One cannot be sure that Vidaurri was ignorant of the order to arrest Comonfort, since it arrived a week or so after his departure for Lampazos. There can be no disputing his attitude, however, in a letter of July 4 to President Juárez, written immediately before he left to meet Comonfort. This letter, in which he asked the president to confirm his safe conduct to Comonfort, was not even sent to Mexico City until two days after he had written it, when he was well on his way to Lampazos. Apparently, Vidaurri wished to be incommunicado in the event that any unwelcome orders arrived from Mexico City.<sup>39</sup>

Vidaurri and Comonfort did not return to Monterrey together. The governor was alone when he arrived at the capital, and Comonfort remained behind to spend some time in a tour of the northern frontier region, which he had never seen. He was well received wherever he went.<sup>40</sup> His delay in going on to Monterrey may have been arranged so that Vidaurri could appeal once more to the national administration. Annoyed by the stand of President Juárez, the governor wrote a second letter to Mexico City on August 9, in which he expressed his feelings vigorously. The authorization of asylum and safe conduct had been granted to the exiled ex-president before the order of arrest was issued, and Comonfort had entered the country with the personal guarantee of the governor of Nuevo León. To turn upon his friend, arrest him, and send him to the national capital for trial would amount to a betrayal. He then urged Juárez to accept the fact that the ex-president was already in the country and to rescind the order of arrest.

Feeling secure in his northern stronghold, isolated from the central portion of the country by hundreds of miles of desert, Vidaurri issued a thinly veiled threat to the national administration. He pointed out that Comonfort was not without friends in the country, and that if the national administration persisted in its course of action, it might bring about a revolution. The letter clearly implied that Vidaurri would support Comonfort in the event that the former

<sup>38</sup> Ministro de Gobierno a Gobernador del Estado de Nuevo León y Coahuila, México, July 20, 1861, Puig Casauranc, *Archivo de Juárez*, I, 299; Domingo Martínez to Ministro de Gobernación, Monterrey, July 28, 1861, *Siglo XIX*, August 16, 1861.

<sup>39</sup> Vidaurri to Juárez, Monterrey, July 4, 1861, in Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario Juárez*, 139-140.

<sup>40</sup> Ignacio Comonfort to Clara Comonfort, Villa Aldama, August 4, 1861, Comonfort papers, folder 23B.

president chose to resist the order of arrest. This was the interpretation that many Mexico City journalists placed upon it, and they began to voice a fear that Manuel Doblado, governor of Guanajuato and a former associate of Comonfort, might also support a revolution of this sort.<sup>41</sup>

Apparently Juárez intended to avoid a direct confrontation with one of his key men in the north. To provoke Vidaurri into an open break with the administration at this time might start up the civil war again. Instead the president allowed the capital press to speak for him and show northerners the tenor of public opinion in Mexico City. The Liberal journalists obliged, and the matter was thoroughly argued in the ensuing month.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile in Monterrey, officials had completed preparations to welcome Vidaurri's distinguished guest. The ex-president was accorded full honors when he arrived on August 8, 1861. But all was not smooth, for at a bullfight held in his honor, abusive hisses and shouts came from the crowd, and three young men were arrested.<sup>43</sup>

Still no word arrived from President Juárez, and Vidaurri wrote his third letter in as many months, repeating his petitions, arguments, and veiled threats. This time Juárez, apparently realizing that hostile public opinion in Mexico City would not make any difference to Vidaurri, decided to reply. In a letter of October 16, 1861, he declared that correspondence from the northern states had not reached him, but he insisted that Comonfort must be arrested, pointing out that personal feelings could not stand in the way of enforcing the law. He also rejected the idea that a revolution might begin if an arrest actually were attempted, for he could not believe that Comonfort would agree to lead it. Juárez concluded by urging Vidaurri to support the national government and the constitution.<sup>44</sup>

In a bitter reply Vidaurri rejected the president's arguments. But just when an open break with the administration seem inevitable, international events overshadowed the quarrel. As a result of the suspension of payment on foreign debts the previous July, Mexico was threatened with invasion and war by Spain, France, and Eng-

<sup>41</sup> Vidaurri to Juárez, Monterrey, August 9, 1861, in Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario Juárez*, 142-143; *Siglo XIX*, July 30, 1861.

<sup>42</sup> *Siglo XIX*, July 30, September 12, 23, 1861.

<sup>43</sup> Pablo Padilla to Dr. Trinidad Padilla, Monterrey, September 7, 1861, Genaro García correspondence, AGE; *Siglo XIX*, August 26, 1861.

<sup>44</sup> Vidaurri to Juárez, Monterrey, September 29, 1861, in Roel (ed.), *Correspondencia Vidaurri*, I, 80-82; Juárez to Vidaurri, México, November 1, 1861, in Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario Juárez*, 144-147.

land. Juárez wrote a conciliatory message to Vidaurri on November 1, 1861, calling on him to forget personal differences and support the nation in its moment of crisis.<sup>45</sup>

When the European troops actually landed in Veracruz, Juárez wrote once more to Vidaurri asking for his support, explaining the plan of defense, and offering him an important role. He was to organize a force of 2,000 men and march to defend the exposed port of Tampico.<sup>46</sup> Thinking that the emergency of the moment might soften the president's resolve, Vidaurri requested amnesty for Comonfort. Once again Juárez refused, though the tone of his letter was less firm, his resolution evidently weakened by the problem of unifying the nation against foreign invasion, and he explained that hostile public opinion had forced him to take a hard stand.<sup>47</sup>

Left to organize the defenses of the North against the French threats at Matamoros and Tampico, Vidaurri searched for a capable and dependable officer to lead the armies he was assembling. He decided to appoint the most experienced military commander available, his guest and protégé, Ignacio Comonfort, to command the forces of Nuevo León and Coahuila. Writing once more to the national administration, Vidaurri asked that bygones be bygones and that the appointment of Comonfort be recognized and approved.<sup>48</sup> After some hesitation, Juárez, swayed by the grave danger facing the nation, gave orders for amnesty and the complete restitution of Comonfort. The president then ordered his appointment as commander of the armies of the North, and allowed him to draw upon the customs receipts of Tampico and Matamoros to help him recruit and finance an army.<sup>49</sup>

Thus in the spring of 1862 the former president finally returned to the good graces of the government. Comonfort had led a

<sup>45</sup> Vidaurri to Juárez, Monterrey, October 31, 1861, in Roel (ed.), *Correspondencia Vidaurri*, I, 90-92; Juárez to Vidaurri, México, November 1, 1861, in Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario Juárez*, 147-148.

<sup>46</sup> Juárez to Vidaurri, México, December 29, 1861, in Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario Juárez*, 151-153.

<sup>47</sup> Juárez to Vidaurri, México, January 13, 1863, in Tamayo (ed.), *Epistolario Juárez*, 157.

<sup>48</sup> Vidaurri to Minister of Foreign Relations, Monterrey, March 16, 1862, *Boletín Oficial*, Monterrey, March 19, 1862; Comonfort to Vidaurri, Monterrey, March 16, 1862, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Vidaurri to Comonfort, Monterrey, May 27, 1862, *Boletín Oficial*, May 28, 1862; Vidaurri to Manuel Doblado, Monterrey, May 28, 1862, *Boletín Oficial*, May 28, 1862; Vidaurri to Comonfort, Monterrey, May 30, 1862, Vidaurri correspondence, AGE; Rosura Hernández Rodríguez, "Ignacio Comonfort y la Intervención Francesa" in Ángel Bassols Batalla *et al.*, *Temas y figuras de la intervención* (México, 1963), 112.

movement to overthrow the constitution under which he had been elected and had spent three years in exile during the War of Reform. Now, by presidential order, he was no longer a criminal to be arrested and tried. The erstwhile traitor had become a commander in the army which was to defend the country against the French invaders.