



## The training of normalista students from Chihuahua and their participation in the agrarian movements of Chihuahua, Mexico, during the 1960s<sup>1</sup>

La formación de estudiantes normalistas de Chihuahua y su participación en los movimientos agrarios de Chihuahua, México, durante la década de 1960

A formação de alunos da escola normal de Chihuahua e sua participação nos movimentos agrários de Chihuahua, México, durante a década de 1960

Arianna Vega Hernández  
Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua (México)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3455-7398>  
[arianna.vega91@gmail.com](mailto:arianna.vega91@gmail.com)

Jesús Adolfo Trujillo Holguín  
Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua (México)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6738-1878>  
[jatrujillo@uach.mx](mailto:jatrujillo@uach.mx)

### Abstract

The 1960s was a period of worldwide upheaval. In Mexico - and particularly in the northern state of Chihuahua - students and teachers took part in the struggle for land distribution. This paper describes the formation of normalista students and their participation in the social movements of the time, focusing on ideological consequences of the socialist education of the Cardenista period (1934-1940) in radical thought and in the combative attitude that they took before the problems of the worker and peasant sector. To structure the article, key documents, hemerographic sources and secondary bibliographies related to the subject are used. Among the preliminary investigations we concluded that the social origin of the students and the training they received in the Normal schools was decisive in their aspirations for change for the most needy population.

**Keywords:** History of education. Teacher training. History of normalism.

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<sup>1</sup> English version by Elco Hiram Bencomo Martínez. E-mail: [elcobencomo@hotmail.com](mailto:elcobencomo@hotmail.com).

## Resumen

La década de 1960 fue un periodo de agitaciones a nivel mundial. En México -y particularmente en el estado norteño de Chihuahua- los estudiantes y profesores tomaron parte en la lucha por el reparto agrario. En este trabajo se da cuenta de la formación de estudiantes normalistas y su participación en los movimientos sociales del momento, centrando la atención en las repercusiones ideológicas de la educación socialista del periodo cardenista (1934-1940) en pensamiento radical y en la actitud combativa que tomaron ante las problemáticas del sector obrero y campesino. Para estructurar el artículo se recurre a documentos primarios, fuentes hemerográficas y bibliografía secundaria relacionada con el tema. Entre las conclusiones preliminares tenemos que el origen social de los estudiantes y la formación que recibieron en las escuelas Normales fue determinante en sus aspiraciones de cambio para la población más necesitada.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de la educación. Formación de maestros. Historia del normalismo.

## Resumo

A década de 1960 foi um período de turbulência mundial. No México – e particularmente no estado de Chihuahua, no Norte – estudantes e professores participaram da luta pela distribuição de terras. Neste trabalho, é dada a formação dos alunos normalistas e sua participação nos movimentos sociais do momento, enfocando as repercussões ideológicas da educação socialista do período cardenista (1934-1940) no pensamento radical e na atitude combativa que eles tomaram diante dos problemas do setor operário e camponês. Para estruturar o artigo, são utilizados documentos primários, fontes hemerográficas e bibliografia secundária relacionadas ao assunto. Entre as conclusões preliminares temos que a origem social dos alunos e a formação que receberam nas escolas normais foi decisiva nas suas aspirações de mudança para a população mais carente.

**Palavras-chave:** História da educação. Formação de professores. História do normalismo.

## Introduction

The main conquest of the Mexican educational system during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the definition of a nationalist and popular educational system that was able to extend to every corner of the country. During the 1920s the government searched for the way to pay the debt with the post-revolutionary generations that awaited better opportunities for development, after the country overcame the armed movement that lasted for a decade. In 1917 a new Political Constitution was issued that reaffirmed the free and secular nature of education and that laid the basis for a fairer country.

Starting in 1921 some projects began to take shape for a new stage of development, where education would play a main role. The foundation of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública), in October of that same year, and the great educational crusade that was developed by the first secretary, José Vasconcelos, which was the foundation for the emergence of the social aspirations of the time.

Even though the Normal educational system was not an accomplishment that is to be attributed to the 1910 Mexican Revolution, it is a fact that its expansion towards rural areas happened during the early 1920s. The Normal urban schools began to be founded during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the main cities of the country, as a consequence of the influence of the French revolution and the positivist current established during the regime of President Porfirio Díaz. On December the 1<sup>st</sup> 1886, the Normal School of Xalapa was inaugurated, in 1887 the Normal School of Professors of Mexico City, and subsequently schools of this nature emerged in almost every capital of the states of the Republic (Oaxaca, Colima, Jalisco, Guanajuato, among others (Loyo and Straples, 2011; Arteaga and Camargo, 2009; Trujillo, 2005; Velasco, 1988). Even regardless of the fact that the establishment's growth didn't advance as fast as the population needed it to grow to face the educational problems of the time.

During the first decades of the twentieth century the high illiteracy rates and the lack of schools were situations that were common in all the rural and indigenous population, where most of the population was. In this context is where the Mexican Rural School appeared, as a project destined to fulfill an old dream of justice for the popular classes, which was later strengthened by the establishment of the rural Normal Schools. These institutions began as Agricultural Centers, and afterward, as Rural Teacher Training Schools, and finally as Rural Normal Schools (Aguayo, 2002), but in essence, they were schools designed to address the problems of the working-class population. The graduated teachers were the ones promoting the agrarian reform and, in short, they were promoters of the social and spiritual improvement of the population. This task began to get stronger during the 1930s, when the constitutional reform of 1934, appeared, and this education acquired a socialist approach during the six-year term of President Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (1934-1940) (Trujillo, 2015a to 2015b; Quintanilla and Vaughan, 1997).

Even though the socialist educational project didn't last long, since the 1940s a new approach was adopted with the School of National Unity. The fact is that the ideological appearance had a deep effect on generations to come, since, at least in the case of Chihuahua, during the convulsive 1960s the desire for social change was rekindled through the reappearance of socialist ideas, the proliferation of the communist influenced political groups and the radical actions that wanted to overthrow the main political and economic structures. This was about a generation of teachers and social leaders who had been trained by the socialist ideologists only two decades before.

The training of students from the Normal School of the State and the Normal Schools of Carmen<sup>2</sup> and Salaiques focused on social change, contrasting it with the situation of the consolidation of a growing economic elite and other problems that got worse during the late 1950s, the fall of the agrarian distribution, crisis in the countryside, massive migration to urban areas, among other problems. Economic groups were favored by local and national policies supporting cattle ranching on a great scale and forestry exploitation (Aboites, 1994), a situation that was more evident in the northwestern region of the state of Chihuahua and that generated a situation of nonconformity in which teachers and students took sides.

This article studies the influence that socialist education (1934-1940) had on the training of students of the Normal School of the State and the two Normal Schools that operated in the former hacienda del Carmen and Salaiques. It looks into how the leftist ideological formation had an impact on the social vocation of the teachers from Chihuahua and the role that a group of students, rural teachers and peasants played in the agrarian struggle in the mountainous region, especially in the armed uprising known as Madera 1965.

For the creation of this work, we resorted mainly to the haemerography that was available in the newspaper El Heraldo de Chihuahua, as well as to the main sources in the Historical Archive of the municipality of Chihuahua and to the secondary bibliography which referred to the theme of normalismo and the regional historiography of Chihuahua. The main purpose is to contribute to the discussion of the contributions of teaching in recent social transformations, and to reevaluate the role of Normal schools within the educational system, since in recent years new voices have appeared insisting on the need to change them, and even disappear in the case of rural schools, with the arguments that do not necessarily consider their importance for social mobility and change.

The academic production on this subject should continue to enrich the debate so that the public policies in Mexico generate the ideal conditions for the Teacher Normal System to recognize its own identity and not continue to apply the same rules as those applied to autonomous university institutions, with a legal framework in which the teaching profession continues to be a profession of the state. Otherwise, they will continue to remain updated on the indicators for higher education and socially, it reinforces the idea that qualifies them in a derogatory way when they fight for their rights (rebels' hotbeds, "unruly schools," "policitized Normal schools, among others")<sup>3</sup>.

### **A necessary reevaluation of the investigation on the Normal education.**

Normal Schools in Latin America were created to properly train to properly prepare teachers in contexts where their number was small and the teacher training they had was scarce. At the time of their creation in the second half of the 19th century, these institutions received the social prejudices of the time regarding the differentiation of schools by gender and also by syllabus, since it was not in the social interest that women and men had equal training and for them to study the same subjects (Ballín, 2017)

The papers studied for this work (Rátiva, 2016; Román, 2011; Galván, 2001; Trujillo, 2005; Pérez, 2001; Alvarado, 2001; Armas, 2001; García, 1996; Chablé, 1996; García, 1993; (among others) allow us to validate the existence of Latin American normal schools since the

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<sup>2</sup> The Normal school del Carmen is the one which was created on March 26, 1931 in the exhacienda del Carmen, which was later called Colonia Agrícola Ricardo Flores Magón, municipality of Buenaventura. This school was given the name Ricardo Flores Magón in 1961, when it was moved to the outskirts of the municipal seat of the municipality of Saucillo, Chihuahua (Escuela Norma Rural Ricardo Flores Magón, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> The events that forced the disappearance of the 43 normalista students, which took place on September 26, 2014, showed the political indifference with which the educational authorities approached the case and to this date the facts have not been clarified nor do we know the whereabouts of these young people.

19th century in some countries of the region (Mexico, Argentina and Colombia) These schools were established to train teachers and therefore diminish the educational problems inherited from colonial times. Their identity changed with time, and in the case of Mexico, they were complemented by the functions taken over by the Rural Normal Schools, whose antecedents date back to the 1920s. Their investigation has been oriented towards understanding processes that account for the dynamics of growth and strengthening; indicators, characteristics of their students, functions of teachers and directors, historical evolution, internal conflicts, among others.

The first Rural Normal School was created in 1922, in the town of Tocámbaro, Michoacán, and its purpose was to directly serve the rural population. Students, teachers and directors were guided by a revolutionary educational vocation and with the commitment that the future teachers would help in the evolution and development of the community where he/she worked (Pinto, 2015). The main Characteristics of these Normal Schools was their distinctive feature of boarding school, the training on economic and social problems of the working class, and the elements that were common throughout the country.

In the 1930s, particularly during the Cardenista period, the ideologies of these teaching centers were strengthened and became visible. Along with the proposal of the syllabus for the training of rural teachers and the agricultural industrial activities that they demanded from the creation of the Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México (Socialist Peasant Students of Mexico) (FECSM), in 1935, the students took over as their own the task of their ideological formation (Ortiz and Medina, 2017)

During this stage, the rural Normal schools were trying to form a student body council that would bring them together. The students were influenced by the progressive policies of President Cárdenas, in the sense of carrying forward the postulates of the Mexican Revolution. They followed the precepts of the workers, the peasants and the popular masses that prospered with the grouping of their forces. The FECSM made up the organism that would group all the schools of this type in the country.

In this context, several factors were incorporated which quenched the formation of their own ideology during the time of the peasant student body council. The political formation of the students was self-managed and it was passed on from generation to generation, which still happens today. In this period of profound ideological commotion, the rural Normal teacher continued to respond to the socialist aspect of education, despite the revival of religious fanaticism that arose during the Guerra Cristera of 1926-1929 (Yankelevich, 1997).

According to their concept and organization as boarding schools, the Normal rural schools incorporated their principles and purposes of the social education and they adopted some peculiar ways within their internal life, which implied a rigorous discipline in the studies and development of their students. They managed to build ways of collective organization to carry out the tasks that were necessary on a daily basis for the operation of their school (Navarro, 2015).

The revolutionary ideological commotion continued in the rural Normal schools, even despite the collapse of the Cardenista project in 1940. By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, socialist ideas were very strong within these institutions, so the history of the Mexican rural normalismo can be associated with the actions of struggle and protest against the government. During this period most of the students continued being of peasant and humble origin. The scholarships and boarding schools were the means to escape and survive for the children of common land holders, miners and other low-income sectors who would not have been able to pay for their education in other institutions such as universities. Entire families were educated and grew up in Normal schools, generation after generation.

Since the stage of socialist education, community groups have been created in many Normal schools, in such a way that in the 1960s, guided by teachers sympathizers Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) (Mexican Communist Party), and the defenders of the

democracy of the union, the teachers, the Normal students supported the teacher's movement. They also supported the student movement of 1968, which ended in the mass murder of young people, imprisonment and closure of 15 rural Normal schools throughout the country. This event was a blow to the Normal school's movement, to their freedom of expression and against their political actions.

The emergence of rural normalism made the right and access for the education of the poorest, including young people from indigenous and peasant communities. As a free public boarding schools many low-income women and men changed their life expectations. The schools developed under a formative model that combined study with work for their students, who joined and supported the social demands and struggles. The investigations reviewed suggested that the graduates of the Normal schools were distinguished by their social commitment, a deep-rooted political conscience and a consistent organizational tradition. In the case of Chihuahua, it is also consistent with these characteristics.

### **Normal schools in the state of Chihuahua**

The emergence of Normal Schools in the state of Chihuahua had two different processes. The first one corresponds to the appearance of the first institution of this type in the capital of the state, of positivist influence, urban and forged on the emergence of the Porfirista regime during the first years of the twentieth century: While the second process corresponds to the emergence of the two rural Normal Schools of the post-revolutionary period: Escuela Normal del Carmen, which began in the municipality of Buenaventura in 1931, and the Escuela Normal "Abraham Gonzalez de Salaires, founded in the south of the state, on January 12, 1927 (Aguayo, 2002)

The state Normal School was the result of the intentions and efforts of many government administrations that proposed projects throughout the nineteenth century, but that managed to create it until January 2, 1906, during the government term of Don Enrique C. Creel. In this regard, Trujillo (2015) mentions that:

With a new institution for teacher training, a period began in which public educational policies began to make sense and it would take things in another direction in which the state anticipated national trends in the definition of the armonious educational system, which at the national level began to be organized until 1921, when the Secretariat of Public Education was born (Trujillo, 2015), p 60.)

The Normal School of the State, despite its Porfirian Origin, had the same characteristics as the rural Normal Schools that were founded later, since its students came mainly from the economically disadvantaged classes, who could venture into the teaching career thanks to the aid of government scholarships. Due to that, its creation and evolution had great popular support. During the 1930s, social ideology permeated Chihuahua's urban normalism, as Trujillo (2015) explains:

The contribution carried out by the Normal School during the period from 1934 to 1936 was of a receiver, interpreter and disseminator of the socialist ideal, and its influence not only included the students who attended its classrooms, but also spread among the organizations of peasants and workers, in the communities and in the large cities where the ideological program was developed, through the radio program, The Socialist Brigades and the cultural events. From 1937 onwards the struggle would be to consolidate an identity of its own, by virtue of the period of independence that was being inaugurated (p. 198)

The identity that the Normal of the State acquired at that time had a decisive influence on the formation of future generations of teachers. Its graduates joined the ranks in the movements for the distribution of land in the ejidos and in the armed uprising of Madera, in 1965, in which even young people who were still enrolled as students of the institution participated (Santos, 1968).

As for the Rural Normal Schools, the state of Chihuahua was no stranger to the educational movement that developed during the 1920s and 1930s at the national level. The characteristics were similar to those of the rest of the country and both the Salaces Rural Normal School (for boys) and the El Carmen Rural Normal School were mainly composed of the children of poor peasants, ejidatarios, peons, small landowners, artisans, workers and rural teachers. These characteristics prevailed throughout its historical development, as expressed in the analysis of an entry, published in 1962 in *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*.

In the rural normal schools, the social origin was an official requirement to apply. According to the 1962 announcement, those interested had to present three certificates: one of “good conduct, issued by the director of the school from which they came”, another of “good conduct issued by the authorities of the place of origin” and another “of peasant origin or settlement in rural areas” (Garcia, 2015, p. 45).

Corroborating this information, in an interview with teacher Ramón Gutiérrez Medrano, a graduate from the Rural Normal of Salaces he confirms that it was a requirement to be the son of peasants and to take an admission test, aspects that allowed the highest scores. The main differences between the State Normal School and the rural Normal schools were not in the curriculum, but in the organization and discipline that the latter needed to survive, which is why the system was so homogeneous throughout the country:

We had to quickly adapt to the new family, because our parents had already been replaced by our teachers. Our mothers by the cooks and the laundresses. There was a very strict binary code, that, if someone is told, up to this date, arrive at 11:00, they are to be 5 minutes early, never later, it is a rule of life, because the times were very exact: 24 hours, a delay was the loss of half a point (R. Gutiérrez, personal communication, March 4, 2020).

Discipline was fundamental in schools where students ranged in age from childhood to puberty and adolescence. In both the Saucillo and Salaces Normal Schools, the boarding school was made up of a school of coexistence and social adaptation. The organization of the rural Normal schools was marked by the Executive Committee of the Student’s Society and by the representatives of the COPI. The latter in the 1950s was in charge of the political debates and ideological training, (Garcia, 2015). It also taught new students the school characteristics of the rural Normal schools, the ones of the country and their fundamental principles. The COPI “organized Marxism reading circles and received invitations to participate on meetings and public manifestations of other Normal schools and other sectors of population” (Garcia, 2015, p. 58).

COPI was made up of students only. It was a very important committee. What was it for? Ideologize, or even better, for political orientation. Since a student came to the first year of secondary school, some days after that, he was summoned to the first level, which were the youngest

ones, and after dinner, on Thursdays, there was a meeting with the COPI. We got together with our peers and superiors and they gave us a talk. They would begin by explaining what FECSM was, and what the FECH was, the Federation of Students from Chihuahua, and which of them were Normal Training School, and where they were. The meetings were each Thursday, at least the first six months of the COPI with the first students (R. Gutierrez, personal communication, march 4, 2020).

The daily life of the Normal training schools was studying, working in the field, and the political and ideological training. These aspects contributed to the formation of social leaders that reinforced the student and social movement of the state.

According to Garcia (2015), there were fundamental factors that allowed that the two Normal Rural schools of Chihuahua would remain attached to the socialist education of the thirties. One of them was the link between the students, where the varones de Salaiques visited their female peers of Saucillo to talk and to keep them informed of their ideological position. On the other side, these influences of the educated teachers in the years of socialist education, were the mentors of the new generations of rural teachers. Professor Ramon Gutierrez corroborates that the young salaicinos, with the justification of creating recreational activities, visited the young women from the Normal training school of Saucillo and they kept a link of information about social issues (R. Gutierrez, personal communication, march 4, 2020).

Another element that distinguished the students of the rural Normal schools was atheism. Even though they brought from home a catholic education, at school, other than not having a school nearby, they were taught a philosophy with the laws of dialectics and demystified all the belief system. "And the truth is that all came out like that, almost, almost, atheist" (R. Gutierrez, personal communication, March 4, 2020). The biggest blow was when it was time to integrate into the community, because they were trained for a society that didn't exist in Mexico, especially at a time, in a decade of caciques and great influence of the Catholic Church.

The system of Normal rural schools was so homogeneous that the government surely reconsidered what it had created and the consequences of the training of the new teachers that it received, as suggested by the decision to shut off many of them, such as the one in Salaiques. In 1969, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz had to stop the student movement at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and the Insituto Politécnico Nacional, before the beginning of the Olympic Games in which Mexico was the host. Thus began the Tlaltelolco massacre and the closing of the schools that supported the movement, among them some rural Normal Training schools.

Yes, they closed Salaiques. We resisted that in Jimenez, we had the support of the railroad workers, which is a very leftist union. They gave us food, lodging, we stayed in Jimenez for a week trying to keep the school from being closed. We spent a week in Jimenez trying to stop them from closing the school, every day in the plaza. But it was already a decree then, to close 14 normal schools and 15 normal schools were left (R. Gutierrez, personal communication, March 4, 2020).

The Normal Schools of Chihuahua not only allowed teachers to meet the needs of the educational system. They trained men and women with an extensive academic, political and social preparation. Its graduates were the main characters of the upheavals of the time and for this reason they were victims of repression, persecution and closure of their schools.



## **Influence of socialist education in normalismo of Chihuahua.**

Socialist education was formally established in Mexico through the first reform of the 3rd article of the Political Constitution of 1917 and “far from resolving the ideological position, it opened a greater radicalization or religious groups, mainly Catholic” (Trujillo, 2015b, p. 80). In the years prior to the reform, different philosophical and ideological approaches created under the concepts of liberalism, secularism, rationalism, socialism, etc., which were not easy to reconcile in the same national educational project, so the socialist reform did not necessarily imply a stage of consensus. The new constitutional text established that:

The education provided by the State will be socialist, and in addition to excluding all religious doctrine, it will fight fanaticism and prejudice, for which the school will organize its teachings and activities in such a way as to create in the youth a rational and accurate concept of the universe and of social life (Poder Ejecutivo Federal (Federal Executive Power, 1934, 9. 849).

The fact that the new educational approach did not specify exactly what should be understood by the term “socialist,” it caused disorientation and a number of different interpretations (Loyo, 2011). However, within Normal schools the idea prevailed that it was an education oriented towards the vindication of the popular masses, attention to the ills of society (religious fanaticism, alcoholism, illiteracy, lack of hygiene) and the eventual collectivization of the means of production. In his public speeches, President Cardenas was in charge of reinforcing this idea.

Even though the socialist stage (1934-1940) was characterized by ideological confrontation and even, by the radicalization of the actions of the opposition in some states, where religious groups boycotted children’s attendance to school (Montes de Oca, 2008; Rockwell, 1997; Camacho, 1991, Yankelevich, 1985), the truth is that it took only a few years for socialist literature to circulate and for a more or less uniform orientation to be formed around what socialism in education should be, with an approach inspired by Marxism and the policies of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the breakdown of socialist education, after the change of federal government in 1940, the promotion of socialist ideas continued and not only continued until the 1950s and 1960s, but they intensified with the social problems that arose during that period and with the influence of international events. This was the case of the rural Normal training schools, where socialist ideas were common in the classrooms, corridors and internal meetings, and even in the bibliography that they studied:

We had the Sociedad de Alumnos Corazon y Acero, presided over by an executive committee that was renewed each year. We belonged to the Federation of Socialist Peasant Students of Mexico (FECSM) (Spanish Acronym for Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México) and we sent delegates to its congresses whenever we were summoned. We also participated, along with the

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<sup>4</sup> At the Normal School of the State of Chihuahua, books were constantly acquired from publishing houses in the capital of the country, so that the Normal training school students could resolve their intellectual concerns and build a well-founded criterion on the socialist school. On November 13, 1934, the donation of 26 titles for the consultation of the students were: *La Acumulación del Capital*, *La Revolución de 1917*, *El Manifiesto Comunista*, *Carlos Marx: Historia de su vida, Literatura y Revolución*, *El Comunismo de Izquierda*, *La Política Económica de la Rusia Soviética*, *Aurora Rusa*, entre otros (Trujillo, Pérez y Hernández, 2015).

state Normal training school and the Saucillo Normal, in the Federation of Chihuahua Students (FECH) (Spanish Acronym for Federación de Estudiantes Chihuahuenses. (Gutierrez, 2014, p. 44)

Rural Normal teacher training schools maintained a combative ideological position of support for popular causes, which became more evident after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, in 1959, and the declaration of its socialist character. Authors such as Reyes (2008), Lopez de la Torre (2013) and Vega-Hernandez (2020), show in their investigations that this external event to Mexico influenced the ideology to be followed by the normalistas, in the exaltation of their leaders (Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro Ruz) and even in the strategies of struggle, as was the case of the assault on the Cuartel de Madera, in September 1965.

The influence of the Cuban Revolution on the social movements of Mexico, specifically of Chihuahua, is understood as an ideology, assumed and indirect, since no evidence was found of direct dealings between the two countries or with specific groups to carry out the uprisings or strikes. This element doesn't discredit the importance of this conflict for the political education of the youth and Mexican teachers that studied, through the work of Che, listening to Radio Havana, the Cuban press and socialist texts, the ideal of the nation as a paradigm for Mexican social movements. By 1961, the normalistas participated in the *April 61 rally for the invasion of Cuba*, an act that united the student body and the peasantry with the Cuban Revolution.

However, not all the inhabitants of Chihuahua were pleased with the rise of socialist ideas and the sympathy for the student and teacher sectors of popular causes. Conservative groups took advantage of the press as a means to discredit leaders or to minimize their demands. The newspaper *El Heraldo*, during 1965, gave follow up to a conflict caused by the lack of vacancies for graduates of the State Normal School. This situation, together with the social problems, increased the conflicts between students and government. Some press releases stated:

The problem of teachers who graduated from the State Normal School progresses every day towards a satisfactory solution, both for the new teachers' guides and also for the State Government. Of 188 requests for positions initially made to the Department of Education, 48 have been filled by the new teachers. This means that only 140 have not been assigned a place to use their services as guides for the children of Chihuahua (*El Heraldo*, 1965, p. 5).

Following its characteristic of right-wing conservative, *El Heraldo's* reports tried to disguise the existing situation for teachers and students of the Normal training schools and even tried to blame the teachers for having chosen the profession the situation led to a strike by students and teachers in solidarity with the graduates. The youth of Chihuahua, mainly those integrated in the Normal schools, showed their opposition to the government and supported other social movements, especially workers and peasants.

### **The change from ideological influence to protests and armed insurrection.**

After the Normal schools consolidated a long tradition in the ideological formation of the teachers of Chihuahua, the next step was one of direct participation in social movements, which was evidenced in three fundamental movements: the caravan of justice, the teachers' strikes and work stoppages, and the guerrilla and attempt to take over the military barracks in Madera.

Some teachers and normalistas had participated in a peasant movement that demanded the dismantling and distribution of large cattle, forestry and irrigation properties. This movement began with a caravan (Caravana de la justicia) of people requesting lands that started in Ciudad Madera and was received by normalistas and students in the state capital, in November 1960 (Garcia, 2015, p. 26).

The caravan of justice emerged as a result of the visit of president Adolfo Lopez Mateo to Chihuahua and its main objective was to ask for the distribution of the ownership of Bosques de Chihuahua (forests of Chihuahua) and to demand justice for the murder of peasant leaders and professor Francisco Lujan Adame in the northwestern region of the state. “This caravan was the acceleration of the solidarity of the normalistas with the Chihuahua peasant movement from 1960 to 1965” (Garcia, 2015, p. 38). The demand for justice for such vulnerable sectors as the peasantry and teachers provoked the union, henceforth indissoluble, between these sectors for the social struggles in the state:

The students from Chihuahua ignited great movements in support to 600 peasants from the mountains that had arrived walking in a caravan to protest. On November 20th after the official parade dedicated to the authorities, there was, under the cold rain, a second parade of peasants, and students in which an unmasking of authorities took place, and they were exposed as faithful defenders of the capital, of the land ownership and of the killers (Gamiz, 1965)

The support of the normalistas was promoting the parade, handing them provisions and food, and in general, providing support of the peasant movement. From this moment on, the cohesion between these two sectors was evident and it intensified throughout the decade, even in the invasions to found new centers.

The second moment of the student and teachers’ movement was in the struggle for the improvement of salary and working conditions. In the mid-sixties, the most representative conflicts between this sector and the government took place. On January 1965, the scenario seemed hopeful and, according to the local press, the preparation of the normalista teachers was guaranteed with the functioning of the Normal Schools and the Federal Institute for Teacher Training, which was actively working.

Teacher’s circles consider it important to increase the number of schools as well as trained teachers for the attention of the students, which was calculated at 270 thousand children for which it was necessary to train 1296 teachers for 1965 to 70 (El Heraldo, 1965, p. 4).

The teachers, led by Section XL of the National Union of Education Workers, went on a strike due to the lack of the necessary solutions to the problems that appeared. With the unity that had already been forged in previous movements, there was great support from peasants, workers, railroad workers and the population in general, although the press discredited the demands (see Figure 1). The teachers were also supported by the superior and private schools that began staggered strikes.

**Figure 1.** Front page story about a teachers' strike.



**Source:** *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*, January 19 1965, p. 1.

In the following days, the governor of the state, General Praxedes Giner Duran, published a communiqué in the newspapers *El Heraldo de Chihuahua* and *Norte de Chihuahua*, addressed to public opinion. In the note he explains that the strike is a movement promoted by “perfectly identified elements within the Normal School, and that it tended to become a serious public problem.” (Giner, 1965, p. 1) The communiqué sought to undermine the demands of the teachers and graduates, to generate a negative opinion of the actions among the people, and to justify the government’s inability to grant positions to the graduated teachers. It directly referred to them:

We make a cordial appeal to the students and teachers of the Normal Schools so that, regrettably aware of the grave responsibility they have before society, in their double capacity as citizens and mentors, to reject the preaching of those who, seeking the satisfaction of their own interests, use them as an instrument of their dissolving and unpatriotic work and act at all times with the restraint and seriousness that should distinguish good teachers (p. 1).

The people that were on strike and the government did not reach an immediate agreement and the teachers’ movement continued its struggle. The newspaper *El Heraldo*, with all its supporters and support for the government, recognized the magnitude of the protests that were taking place and that had managed to unite teachers, students and sympathizers from different sectors (See Figure 2). Violence and repressive acts appeared, as reported in the *Norte* newspaper of October 23, 1965:

The grenadier corps (of the municipal police) broke up yesterday morning, an ordered demonstration by the ENE students, in support of their unemployed colleagues. In the initial graphic, the students carried a coffin, simulating the death of education. They are followed by young women mourning. Then a student and a young boy flee from the effects of the gas on Aldama Street (p.1).

The repressive measures of the state government were not limited to suffocating the strike movements, but involved other measures against institutions such as the *Escuela Normal del Estado*, which marked a stage of distancing, not only with the institution, but also with the

Chihuahua teachers. Trujillo (2005) points out that among the most radical measures was the closing of the Normal Nocturna (Night teacher training school) and the boarding schools for students. “The state public administration, headed by Giner, had the idea that the teachers and the Normal School itself were a center where student agitation was provoked.” (p. 97).

**Figure 2.** Student support for the strike of the teachers and violent dissolution by the authorities.



**Source:** *Norte de Chihuahua*, October 23, 1965, p. 1.

Adding the agrarian movement to the teachers’ conflicts, we see that these were not isolated events. “The teachers, the railroad workers, the doctors, the teacher training students and the peasants, with their actions, point out the closed-mindedness and authoritarianism of the government towards the most sensitive social problems and the most representative groups of society” (Ornelas, 2010, p. 1). The assault on the Madera Barracks and the indirect involvement of the normalista students was not isolated either, an event that appears as the third element of ideological influence in the normalista student and teacher sector and which was the peak of the social upheavals of the sixties.

Ornelas (2010) explains that there were two important groups of the peasant movement during the decade of the 1960s. One was the nucleus of the UGOCM located in Madera and the Sierra region, and the other in the city of Delicias. The situation caused the government to take reprisals to try to calm down the nonconformists, with actions such as the dismissal of normalista teachers (Raul Gomez and Pablo Gomez) who worked at the Escuela Normal Rural Ricardo Flores Magon.

This repression does not only include peasant leaders, students are also repressed, gassed and imprisoned as happened to Hilario Cardona, Guillermo Rodríguez Ford and others. The aforementioned students are from the Normal del Estado who lead the takeover of the DAAC offices to force them to the agrarian distribution. It is very important to highlight the important role played by Rural Normal training schools. In this process, the so called, “normalismo” as students and later in the classroom and the most isolated and poor communities fought their best battles (Ornelas, 2010, p. 2).

With the existing agrarian situation in the state, the disagreements of various sectors, among them teachers and students, the conditions were supposedly created for the formation of guerrilla groups. Prior to the Madera events, two meetings were held in the Sierra (1963 and 1965), where guerrillas and allies met for political and tactical training.

During the first encounter in 1963, the students, mainly from the Salaces Normal School, had an outstanding participation:

Delegations from 5 different federative entities, men and women, workers, peasants and students participated. The ENR delegation from Salaiques supported the curious and idealistic thesis that before starting revolutions and taking power it is necessary to teach ethics to the masses (Gámiz, 1965).

The position of the representatives of the Escuela Normal Rural of Salaiques was not well received by the radical elements that made up the encounter, but the presence and the support of the normalistas was indisputable.

The conditions for the armed uprising were brought forth. On January 1965 there was a congress of UGOCM in Cd. Madera and that is where the idea of taking measures first appeared, “which they had already began to exercise, by taking up the arms, against the caciques of the region” (Ornelas, 2010, p.4) The young participants in the uprising traveled to Mexico City for military training and on September 23, 1965 they carried out, ineffectively, the assault on the Madera Barracks, where only five of the thirteen participants survived.

Out of the total number of those involved, six were normalistas. Arturo Gamiz, who was a teacher in the service of the State Government and in September 1959 he had enrolled as a student at the Escuela Normal del Estado; Pablo Gomez Ramirez, who studied to become a teacher at the Normal del Estado, later became a doctor in Mexico City and worked for several years at the Ricardo Flores Magon Escuela Normal Rural; Miguel Quinonez Pedroza, who had graduated from the Escuela Normal Rural of Salaiques in 1963 and during the last two years of his major he was a leader of the National Council of Peasant and Socialist Students of Mexico; Oscar Sandoval Salinas, who was still a student at the Escuela Normal Superior and was 19 years old on the day of his death; and finally Francisco Ornelas, who was the only one of the normalistas who survived. He is currently a writer and witness of those events.

The testimonies of students of the Rural Normal School of Salaiques were silent flyers to inform them of what was happening and to prevent new uprisings. “The State Government sent us flyers where they condemned the “violent actions” as if telling us, you are not to do that again, or something like that. (R. Gutierrez, personal communication, 2020)

With the events of Madera, the actions of the Normalistas didn't end, as they continued throughout the decade. In 1968, the Chihuahua Normalistas supported the actions and repudiated the repression:

So we supported them from here, modestly, and we were repressed in a certain way since the army didn't allow us to go to Jimenez city to go on a strike. We crossed the flooded river and entered Jimenez. We entered Parral to give the people information as it was, and not as the media manipulated it. This was our experience (R. Gutierrez, personal communication, 2020)

The actions of the students of the Salaiques Normal were one of the motivations for the government to announce months later the closure of the school and the students were relocated to the Normal of Durango, thus closing a stage of struggle.

## Conclusions

The training of normal students of Chihuahua, under the principles of socialist ideology, was the determining factor on linking the teacher's function to the struggle for improvement of the living conditions of the most unprotected social classes, mainly peasants, day laborers and workers. The Normal Schools of Chihuahua were the institutions in charge of transmitting this

vocation to generations of teachers for more than three decades, in spite of the breakdown of the socialist project of the Cardenist era (1934-1940). However, the transition from a stage of peaceful struggle to the conception of the armed struggle as a radical measure to achieve social change cannot be attributed to the armed struggle as a radical measure to achieve social change cannot be attributed either to the socialist ideology or to the training received in the teacher training institutions.

It can be inferred, as a preliminary conclusion, that the circumstances of the 1960s created the conditions for taking the armed route, since the demands for agrarian, student and teachers' problems were not only ignored by the government, but were violently repressed when they protested. Additionally, there were conditioning factors in the international context such as the ideological influence of the Cuban Revolution, the mythification of guerrilla figures, such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro and new forms of liberal thought that were emerging around the world; but they were also causes of determination at the local level that accelerated these processes: government authoritarianism, inability to establish a dialogue with non-conformist groups and protection of the interests of economic elites who did not want to give up their privileges.

The investigation of the historical development of the Mexican Normalismo and its participation in the great social changes is, without a doubt, an issue that should be researched academically again. Normal schools, mainly rural ones, should be considered a bulwark for the educational system, since they are one of the few spaces in which social mobility and access to educational services for the neediest is promoted; while State policies have plunged them into neglect during the last decades, as evidenced by the events of Ayotzinapa in 2014.

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