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Re-envisioning society: the radicalization of the student youth movement in Mexico during the 1960s

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**RE-ENVISIONING SOCIETY: THE RADICALIZATION OF THE STUDENT
YOUTH MOVEMENT IN MEXICO DURING THE 1960s**

By

Lily Fox

Accepted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Kathleen Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

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Chair, Dr. A. Ricardo López

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Master's Thesis

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Lily Fox
May 16, 2012

**RE-ENVISIONING SOCIETY: THE RADICALIZATION OF THE STUDENT
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A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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May 2012

Abstract

Utilizing documents from student organizations including strike committees, the National Center For Democratic Students, and the writings of young activists, official commentary, and press releases, this study provides a detailed examination of the student movement in Mexico during the 1960s. Within the historiography of the student youth movement studies tend to focus exclusively on 1968 and the movement's position within the global counterculture. The product of this history is the proliferation of a homogenous understanding of the concerns mobilizing youth activists. This study however, attempts to advance previous historiography by expanding the scope of the student movement to include more broadly the 1960s. This allows for a greater understanding of the forces that radicalized students, illustrating that student activism was driven by educational, economic, social, and political concerns, including access to jobs and social mobility, demands for social welfare, and the creation of more equitable and democratic society. This gained understanding further challenges histories centered on delineating the movement as purely cultural or purely a political movement. Rather, when examining the diverse concerns radicalizing students, this study illustrates the interconnection between both political and cultural characteristics of youth activism.

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I also owe sincere thanks to my fellow student and dear friend, Ramy Khalil. From start to finish Ramy offered his ideas, critiques, and grammatical excellence.

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INTRODUCTION

On July 22, 1968 violence broke out in the streets of México City. Rivalries between contending secondary schools and local gangs erupted into violent street fights.¹ In response, the city's Police Undersecretary made the decision to deploy México's riot police, the *granderos*, to put an end to the fighting. This decision would have colossal ramifications, as some have argued it ignited the 1968 student movement.² Three days later students organized against the brutality of police forces. On July 26, 1968 a march led by the Federación Nacional de Estudiantes Técnicos (FNET), the National Federation of Students, merged with a protest directed by the Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos (CNED), the National Center of Democratic Students. CNED, a more left leaning organization that generally aligned with México's national university, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), gathered in response to the violence, as well as to celebrate the anniversary of the 1953 attack on the Moncada army barracks in Cuba.³ This time however, the violence, which ensued from the deployment of the *granderos*, resulted in the death of seven protesters along with hundreds of others who were injured.⁴

In the wake of this violence students from UNAM and the Politechnical Institute joined together in a general strike, provoking the closure of all of México City schools.⁵ This coalition between UNAM and Politech reflected an unexpected alliance. UNAM was a prestigious university which attracted aspiring business elite and politicians, while the Politech students

¹ Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2005), 40; George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), 47.

² Carey, 39.

³ Katsiaficas, 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵ Carey, 48; Evelyn P. Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico* (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974), 199; Katsiaficas, 47.

generally came from the middle or working class.⁶ Despite divergent socioeconomic standing, these students united across institutions in a stand against the violent repression of the police forces. However, when students refused to evacuate, campus police entered with bazookas and occupied UNAM, as well as, other preparatory schools.⁷ This violence coupled with the government's continued refusal to allow public negotiations led students to formulate a national strike council, Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH). On August 8, 1968 representatives from schools across the city were elected to the council to organize a city-wide strike.⁸

CNH also helped solidify six key demands of the growing student movement. These demands included the release of political prisoners arrested during the confrontation with the *granderos* in addition to prisoners taken during earlier union strikes. The second demand called for the elimination of Article 145 of the Penal Code, designated to fight internal subversion and outlaw rebellious activity. The student's third and fourth demands were the abolition of the *granderos* and the dismissal of the city's police chief. The fifth demand was for indemnity to be given to the victims injured during the violent confrontations. Finally, students also insisted on the administration of justice against all those responsible for the violent repression.⁹

Responding to the government's continued refusal to recognize student concerns and negotiate publicly, the strike council organized a rally for October 2, 1968 in the Plaza de Las Tres Culturas.¹⁰ What began as a relatively routine rally quickly transformed into a site of violent repression. Evident in the recollections of numerous participants, the violence that unfolded occurred without warning. Participants recall the image of army units as they encircled the crowd

⁶ Carey, 48.

⁷ Carey, 49; Katsiaficas, 48; Stevens, 202.

⁸ Carey, 62-63; Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 120.

⁹ Stevens, 48; Zolov, 121.

¹⁰ Katsiaficas, 48.

blocking points of exit.¹¹ A helicopter flying overhead descended closer to the crowd before firing on the demonstrators. Undercover police, recognizable by the white gloves they wore, also began firing at the demonstrators. This storm of bullets devastated the crowd, killing an unknown number of civilians. Estimates suggest as many as 400 were killed, whereas the government reported only 100 deaths.¹² The student movement was largely shattered.

The Historiography of the Student Movement: Debating the Political Nature of Student Activism

This timeline of events leading to the tragic massacre on October 2 constitutes a reoccurring metanarrative in the historiography of the student movement in México. Historians intent on situating México within the worldwide eruption of revolt in 1968 tend to confine the existence of the student movement to a single year, reproducing this narrative, while overlooking an extensive history of student activism. Further, placing the student movement within the international youth counterculture has generated debate among historians as to whether the student movement in México was a political movement or simply cultural, reflective of the superficial rebellious nature of the greater counterculture. This debate is important not only for how the student movement is to be remembered in history, but also for the perception of student actions. Historians suggesting that student activism was purely part of the counterculture, reducing student motivations to a mere trend. Trends consequently are fleeting, something that passes as new interests become fashionable. Conversely, recognizing the political nature of the movement allows historians to identify a greater engagement with society on a more complex level as students critically evaluated social conditions and governmental structures. This recognition designates students as political actors within México. Ultimately, however, by

¹¹ Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 213.

¹² Katsiaficas, 48.

focusing strictly on one side of the political-cultural dichotomy, historians inhibit a detailed understanding of the forces radicalizing student activism.

Within the historiography centered on establishing the cultural form of youth activism, historians have focused on illustrating the self-interested nature of specific radicalizing forces to dismiss the presence of political content. For example, writing in 1974 Evelyn P. Stevens in her book, *Protest and Response in México*, argues that student mobilization against economic matters failed to foster a political movement. In her study Stevens examines the student movement in relation to two earlier protests, the Railroad Strike of 1958-1959 and the Doctor's Strike of 1964-1965. The purpose of her study is to understand the government's response to these strikes. Stevens ultimately illustrates a strong correlation between public protest and government hostility, challenging assumptions that violent state repression in México was atypical. Additionally, by examining the student movement in context with these earlier strikes, Stevens depicts México's youth activists as being driven by socioeconomic concerns. She explains that beginning in the 1940s social conditions in México began to deteriorate, as industrial growth became the cornerstone of national economic policy.¹³ Social welfare programs such as low-cost housing, food subsidies, social security, and investments in education were greatly curtailed, making these benefits unattainable by peasants and the urban poor.¹⁴ These conditions, compounded by reduced wages, fueled public protest, specifically by railroad workers and doctors. Stevens explains that in both 1958 and 1964 students stood in solidarity with these strikers, providing evidence of a history of student protest prior to 1968.

This political involvement, Stevens suggests, helped inspire youth activists to protest against reduced education spending, encouraging students to initialize their own strike in 1968.

¹³ Stevens, 265-266.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 265.

According to Stevens, while this strike can be seen as economically inspired she does not label the students as political actors; rather she emphasizes the cultural aspects of the movement. She states that students dismissed norms of “parochialism” and “reserve” for a “Woodstock spirit” characterized by profanity and obscenities.¹⁵ Since the publication of *Protest and Response in México*, various historians writing after Stevens have referenced her account as illustrating the cultural nature of the student movement, ultimately solidifying her argument.¹⁶

Similarly, Donald Mabry, argues that the student movement has generally been localized and therefore not of national political importance.¹⁷ Focusing his research on the Mexican state and the university, Mabry traces earlier occurrences of student protest in 1929 and 1933 ultimately asserting that early student protests were “self-serving,” generally challenging increases in tuition, alterations to graduation requirements, and intensification of exams.¹⁸ However, in 1968 Mabry recognizes a shift towards a more national political criticism. He discounts this political criticism, though, as a mere effort to gain greater popular support for the university and, thus, equally self-serving.¹⁹ Ultimately, Mabry discredits the political nature of the movement because of the students’ failure to generate any meaningful change.

The student’s apparent “preoccupation” with professional concerns equally emphasized the movement’s self-serving character. Writing for the *Concise Encyclopedia of México*, Jesús Vargas Valdez argues that a common concern among students was that school curriculum

¹⁵ Ibid, 204-208.

¹⁶ Yoram Shapira, “The Impact of the 1968 Student Protest on Echeverría’s Reformism,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 19 (Nov 1977): 558; Zolov, 122, 125.

¹⁷ Donald J. Mabry, “The Mexican Government and Student Conflict: An Essay,” in *Student Protest: The Sixties and After*, ed. Gerard J. Degroot (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998), 137; Donald J. Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1917* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982).

¹⁸ Mabry, “The Mexican Government and Student Conflict,” 134.

¹⁹ Ibid, 137.

inadequately prepared students for the professional arena.²⁰ This was reflective of the saturated job market, which left an increasing number of graduates unemployed. These professional concerns, Valdez acknowledges, did erupt into a larger social movement in response to police brutality. However, Valdez contends that the movement remained purely social. Political factions such as the Juventud del Partido Comunista and the Maoist movement within México, constituted only a “small nucleus” of students, remaining marginalized from the general movement.²¹ Valdez further elaborates that in the wake of the October 2nd massacre students were entirely depoliticized, suggesting that by 1969 youth were consumed with drugs, rock n’ roll, and the larger hippie movement which characterized the counterculture. Together Stevens, Mabry, and Vargas Valdez advance the historiography of the student movement beyond the larger metanarrative by suggesting some degree of activism—whether economically driven or self-centered—prior to 1968. However, according to these historians, such concerns fail to constitute political action. Thus, the political-cultural dichotomy in the historiography of the student movement is, in part, perpetuated by differences in how historians define “political.”

Another trend within the historiography focused on asserting the cultural nature of activism, has been for historians to comment on the student movement in relation to a more expansive examination of the global counterculture. For example, Jeremi Suri, in his book *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*, explores how popular protest affected foreign policy during the Cold War, arguing that the international protest movement during 1968 influenced political leaders to assume a policy of détente. Although Suri does not focus directly on the student movement in México, his study holds importance for historians who disregard the political consciousness of student activists. Suri maintains that despite the vociferous “language

²⁰ Jesús Vargas Valdez, “Student Movement of 1968,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2001), 738.

²¹ Valdez, 738.

of dissent” projected by youth globally; this language was devoid of any political significance.²² Rather, according to Suri, youth were simply reiterating the words of intellectual elites. To suggest that students were mere emulators of intellectuals, however, denies students the capacity to be free thinkers and also fails to recognize the students’ own unique, political project. This ultimately reduces the political agency of students, devaluing their activism along with the ideals promoted by the movement. Further, with little political value attributed to the student movement, the possibility of recognizing changes or even responses generated by student activism is likely to go unnoticed.

Forrest D. Colburn in his book, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries*, also comments on this historiographic debate. Colburn’s study consists of a comparative analysis of revolutions in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East in an attempt to reveal the similarities among revolutions taking place in very distinctive national settings.²³ However, more relevant to the context of this study, Colburn discounts the political activism among intellectuals and university students as a mere fascination with revolution, arguing that revolution had become a ‘vogue’ during the 1960s.²⁴ The Left as Colburn seems to suggest promoted a romanticized notion of revolutions in Cuba, Vietnam, and China because the revolutions were a “fashion” rather than embodying a movement for political change. The political concerns of student activists then, according to both Suri and Colburn were shallow and reflected a trend among intellectuals rather than a true consciousness.

Affirming that Suri and Colburn’s assertion holds some truth in the context of the Mexican student movement, Luis González de Alba, a former student leader, challenges the assumption that participating in the student movement engendered a political consciousness

²² Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 3.

²³ Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 5.

²⁴ Colburn, 48.

among participants. González de Alba suggests that students were stirred by the excitement of rebellion. He writes, "...but what fun was the party, we made the streets ours, the carnival, the laziness, the stopped traffic, the chaos..."²⁵ His recollection then is characterized by an atmosphere of fiesta and carnival; he celebrates the lackadaisical and disorderly nature of the movement that accompanied the student's takeover of the streets.²⁶ Further, while he does acknowledge the existence of serious minded students, his account largely celebrates the predominate interest in sexuality, long hair, drugs, and rock n' roll.²⁷ Ultimately, the recorded experience of González de Alba has been utilized by historians attempting to demonstrate the countercultural nature of student activism. However, this tendency typifies a common error, which is the failure to recognize cultural acts as political statements. This error advances the political-cultural dichotomy, inhibiting a more complete understanding of student activism during the 1960s.

Collectively these historians have elucidated alternative factors that motivated student protest, including educational and professional concerns. These factors help to expand beyond the larger narrative of 1968 to illustrate a longer and more complex history of student activism. Ultimately, these historians adhere to a constricted definition of political protest as constituting a challenge to government structure and policy. Accordingly, they have argued against the political nature of the student movement, challenging the idea that economic, self-serving, and cultural characteristics of student activism can be considered political.

Jesús Gutiérrez's personal account of his involvement as a student activist, challenges the previous historiography centered on discrediting the political consciousness of the movement.

²⁵ Luis Gonzalez de Alba, "La fiesta y la tragedia," *Nexos* 189 (September 1993): 27. The various translations within this study are my own.

²⁶ Gonzalez de Alba, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 27.

Gutiérrez proclaims that his participation with the movement transformed him and other students from “naïve nonactors in political life” to individuals intent on fighting for the socialist reorganization of México.²⁸ In an attempt to reconcile experiences such as the one lived by Gutiérrez with the larger history of the student movement, historians on the other side of the historiographical debate have insisted on seeing students as participants in a political movement. These historians have largely focused on placing the student movement within the context of the New Left. For example, George Katsiaficas writing in 1987 asserts that students were the central catalysts for making the New Left a global movement.²⁹ His study, centered on illuminating the international connections of the social movements in 1968, is rooted in what he calls global *eros* effects.³⁰ He argues that the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution, and anti-imperialism were concerns that united students transnationally, representing an instance of the global *eros* effect. United by these concerns, youth activists transformed the New Left into a global movement. Further, what he finds most significant was the extent to which the actions of students in 1968 became political, asserting that economic struggles were transformed into political movements, as “self-interests” became “universal interests.”³¹ He cites increased militancy, boycotts and sit-ins in Turkey, Scandinavia, and Africa as evidence for the increased politicization.³²

Katsiaficas’ attention towards Latin America is fairly limited. In his brief discussion of México’s student movement Katsiaficas reproduces the metanarrative presented at the outset of this introduction. In doing so, his account simply depicts students as acting in response to police brutality, failing to recognize other local concerns motivating students. As a consequence, México’s student movement becomes homogenous with the larger international movement,

²⁸ Michael Soldatenko, “Mexico ’68: Power to the Imagination!” *Latin American Perspectives* 32 (2005): 68.

²⁹ Katsiaficas, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

³¹ *Ibid*, 42.

³² *Ibid*, 42.

suggesting that youth were largely politicized by concerns with Vietnam and anti-imperialism. However, as other historians have illustrated, educational and economic concerns may have motivated student protest as well, indicating that international examinations of student protest may mask more than they reveal.

Eric Zolov offers a different interpretation of the student movement in México locating his analysis within the wider context of the New Left. Inspired by Van Gosses who defines the New Left in the United States as a “movement of movements,” Zolov insists that historians are in need of a revisionist framework for understanding the social movements of the 1960s in Latin America.³³ He argues that “non-armed” rebellion including both student protest and México’s hippy movement equally embody branches of the New Left, along with the more radical armed-guerrillas.³⁴ Zolov asserts that both forms of protest are “twin facets of diverse and intersecting movements.”³⁵ Thus, both armed and non-armed protest can challenge state power and social norms. This suggestion that countercultural practices, which defied traditional Mexican conventions, should be understood as constituting political action begins to advance previous history by incorporating cultural elements within the political sphere.³⁶

In this context, Zolov labels México’s student movement as being politically motivated, illustrated in the student’s “irreverence” for the nation’s political system.³⁷ Zolov recognizes this irreverence within the larger narrative of 1968 and the escalation of events that led to the massacre on October 2nd. Student demands for the release of political prisoners and the dismissal of Article 145 of the Penal Code reflects a larger challenge to the political system, according to

³³ Eric Zolov, “Expanding our Conceptual Horizons: The Shift from an Old to a New Left in Latin America,” *A Contra Corriente* 5 (Winter 2008): 51.

³⁴ Zolov, “Expanding our Conceptual Horizons,” 52.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

³⁶ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 1.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 122.

Zolov. Thus, by studying student activism in the context of the larger countercultural atmosphere, Zolov not only asserts the political nature of the movement, but contends that countercultural practices, which others dismissed as superficial rebelliousness, actually need to be understood as part of the larger political movement of the New Left.

In accordance with Katsiaficas and Zolov, Jeffery Gould's examination of the 1968 student movement in Uruguay, Brazil, and México, similarly situates student activism within the New Left. Influenced by social theorist Immanuel Wallerstein, Gould in his article "Solidarity Under Siege: Latin American Left, 1968" argues that the New Left posed a political challenge to the world capitalist system.³⁸ Students inspired by the New Left in Latin America shared with Europeans and North Americans a demand for participatory democracy, social welfare, and a general opposition to imperialism, particularly in reference to Vietnam.³⁹ Gould further challenges assertions of the superficiality of student protests by providing personal testimonies that illustrate a strong political commitment. He quotes one student who claimed that their life was entirely changed by participating in the movement.⁴⁰ A second student Eduard Valle stressed, "'68 was a moment of...immense commitment...commitment that I took on with the assumption that something...could happen to you."⁴¹ Gould further challenges those who dismiss the movement as superficial by also allowing for countercultural practices within the political movement. However, unlike Katsiaficas and Zolov, Gould asserts that challenges to social norms—like those posed by the counterculture—are not only part of the political movement but are a central component to revolution.⁴²

³⁸ Jeffery Gould, "Solidarity Under Siege: Latin American Left, 1968," *The American Historical Review* 114 (April 2009): 350.

³⁹ Gould, 351.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 365.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 365.

⁴² *Ibid*, 367.

Focusing more broadly on the Cold War, Greg Grandin also provides an important contribution to the discussion of the New Left. In agreement with Gould, Zolov's understanding of the New left as constituting both "armed" and "unarm" revolutionary activity is in response to Greg Grandin's more militant classification of the New Left as a "will to act."⁴³ In his book *The Last Colonial Massacre*, Grandin elaborates that the "will to act" is embodied in a continuous dialect between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces, which serve to radicalize and polarize everyday life.⁴⁴ Beginning in 1954 with the U.S. backed overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz, Guatemalans from the left became radicalized by the loss of liberal ideals and advancements promoted during the October Revolution.⁴⁵ Correspondingly, a counterinsurgency mobilized in response to fears of liberalization and socialist policy, as well as, status anxiety, and racism.⁴⁶ Furthering this dialect between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces was also Cold War terror, introduced by the United States as a means for securing a free market empire. Grandin argues that terror fueled racist thoughts, incited reaction from the left, and further encouraged repressive responses from the counterinsurgency. Ultimately, Grandin illustrates the importance of examining the forces radicalizing political actors, and in doing so he also allows for a greater attention and understanding of the "human" experience during the Cold War.

More than simply helping to understand the complexity of radicalization, Grandin's book, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, also illustrates other important shifts in the historiography of the Cold War. For example, he suggests that the Cold War was not simply a contest between U.S. democracy and Soviet communism, but rather embodies a challenge to the very meaning of

⁴³ Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin American in the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 15.

⁴⁴ Grandin's study focuses specifically on the experience of Guatemalans.

⁴⁵ In the years immediately following the end of World War II a democratic fervor spread throughout many Latin American countries, this trend is referred to as the October Revolution.

⁴⁶ Members of the counterrevolution largely consisted of extreme Catholics, anti-communist youth, and those in the middle class seeking to advance socially.

democracy. He argues that the real legacy of the Cold War was the transformation of an understanding of democracy rooted in social equality and social security, to a definition of democracy based on hierarchy, personal freedom, and free market ideology.⁴⁷ This argument asserts the centrality of Latin America to the history of the Cold War, demonstrating how countries, such as Guatemala, became vital Cold War battlefields. Other historians have similarly illustrated the importance of Latin America, arguing that countries including Cuba and Argentina, were not simply battlegrounds for the superpower rivalry to play out, but rather were independent actors, directly shaping policy and the direction of the Cold War.⁴⁸ Thus, more recent studies have focused on expanding Cold War historiography beyond understandings of the conflict as constituting a confined superpower rivalry.

A beneficial corollary of recognizing the importance of Latin American actors has been the increasing emphasis on the transnational character of the Cold War. Transnational elements materialize in political and cultural encounters between the United States, the Soviet Union, and

⁴⁷ This change occurred as individuals isolated themselves as a means of survival, resulting in the separation of the “self and solidarity,” which Grandin states are two central components necessary for liberal democracy. Grandin, 198.

⁴⁸ Daniela Spenser, “The Caribbean Crisis: Catalyst for Soviet Projection in Latin America,” in *In From the Cold: Latin American’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 104; In this article Daniela Spenser illustrates the influence of Cuba on Soviet policy. The Soviet Union, originally intent on sponsoring unarmed revolution, was forced to support Cuba’s militaristic campaigns, in an attempt to preserve Soviet influence in Latin America. Had the Soviet Union refused to back Cuba, they feared China or worse the United States would gain the upper hand in the region. Spenser argues that the decision to support Cuba taxed the Soviet Union’s military budget and also severely hurt relations with the United States, deepening tension between the two superpowers. Cuba’s assistance to revolutionary movements in Africa and elsewhere also challenged the political posture of the United States. In accordance with Spenser, Thomas Blayton similarly strives to elucidate the role of Latin America in the Cold War by illustrating how Mexico was able to maintain a degree of independence by remaining neutral. Evidenced in new archival material released by the National Security Archive, Blayton argues that Mexico was “Janus faced” at times helping the United States, while also expressing support for Cuba. Additionally, Ariel Armony, examines the role of Argentina in the promotion of the “Dirty War” against communism and leftist forces within Argentina and also throughout the region. Argentinean officials exported both military equipment and counterinsurgency training to various Central American countries including Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras. Ariel C. Armony, “Transnationalizing the Dirty War: Argentina in Central America,” in *In From the Cold: Latin American’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 136; Thomas Blayton, “Recovering the Memory of the Cold War: Forensic History and Latin America,” in *In From the Cold: Latin American’s New Encounter with the Cold War*. ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (London: Duke University Press, 2008).

various other countries. These encounters or “contact zones” are defined by an exchange of ideas, resources, and generally a shared goal.⁴⁹ For example, Cuba’s assistance to African revolutionaries, as well as, the promotion of U.S. counterinsurgency forces in Guatemala, provide examples of transnational encounters. However, these encounters are not simply political or militaristic, but are cultural as well. Historians seeking to move beyond a diplomatic centered history focus more on the cultural aspects of Cold War interactions, illustrating that the experience of the cold war for many individuals, extended beyond national borders, and was neither exclusively political nor cultural.⁵⁰

Moving Beyond Dichotomies: Historicizing the Student Movement

Much like the larger history of the Cold War, failing to recognize the interconnection between political and cultural realms inhibits a complete understanding of student activism during the 1960s and the experience within that movement. Advocates of the cultural form of youth activism veil the political intent and societal vision promoted by students. While,

⁴⁹ Armony, 136.

⁵⁰ For example, Eric Zolov’s study of the counterculture in Mexico illustrates how youth participated in transnational experiences through the promotion of rock n’ roll and other countercultural interests. Additionally, in an essay studying the student attack of the Mexican-North American Cultural Institute in Morelia, Zolov illustrates how the institute attempted to create an image of Pan-Americanism through cultural objects. However, in solidarity with Cuban revolutionary forces, following the Bay of Pigs, students sought to destroy the institute in rejection of a false Pan-Americanism they believed the institute embodied. Similar to the cultural center, the United States also sought to engender support for the U.S. through Mexican news sources. Seth Fein in his essay, “Producing the Cold War in Mexico: The Public Limit of Covert Communications,” explains how the U.S. through “Project Pedro” constructed Mexico’s newsreels in an attempt to control and influence the representation of the U.S. and the world more broadly. In both examples cultural objects were employed as a means of advancing the United States’ political project. Additionally, Both Zolov and Victoria Langland discuss the transnational popularity of cultural signifiers, such as mini-skirts and birth control, as illustrating the changing role of women in terms of sexual promiscuity. Participating in these “nontraditional” cultural behaviors represents a political challenge to the place of women in society. Ultimately these examples solidify an interconnection between cultural and political realms. Zolov, *Refried Elvis*; “Cuba Si, Yanquis No!” in *In From the Cold: Latin American’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 214-252; Seth Fein, “Producing the Cold War in Mexico: The Public Limit of Covert Communications,” in *In From the Cold: Latin American’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (London: Duke University Press, 2008); Victoria Langland, “Birth Control Pills and Molotov Cocktails: Reading Sex and Revolution in 1968 Brazil,” in *In From the Cold: Latin American’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (London: Duke University Press, 2008).

historians intent on stressing the student movement's position within the New Left commonly reproduce the metanarrative, confining student activism to 1968. This positioning tends to produce an image of a homogenous, international student movement while also naturalizing student protest as an expected response to government repression. The following study, however, proposes a need to move beyond the dichotomy of political versus cultural to understand the forces radicalizing student activism, and also to allow for the inclusion of cultural acts within the student's political project. In order to accomplish this, this study attempts to extend the focus beyond 1968 to examine a more expansive history of student activism in México. Ultimately, by historicizing the student movement in México during the 1960s this study argues that student activism was driven by educational, economic, social, and political concerns, including access to jobs and social mobility, demands for social welfare, and the creation of more equitable and democratic society.

Each chapter examines how students articulated their discontent and the different radicalizing forces motivating their activism. The first chapter focuses on university centered concerns, primarily demands for institutional autonomy from government intrusion. Beginning with the 1966 crisis at UNAM, newspaper articles, student publications, and administrative commentary reveal that students demanded representation and influence within the university. Students desired academic autonomy to create a more expansive curriculum centered less on economic concerns and more on the interests of students. Ultimately, this chapter reveals an early history of student activism driven by educational matters, thus challenging the larger 1968 narrative on police brutality as the igniting factor of student activism.

The second chapter examines discontent over diminishing employment opportunities, illustrating how in many respects, student activism reflected a class project intent on securing a

middle class identity. For middle and upper class students the prospects of unemployment or non-professional employment posed a challenge to their class identity, which was rooted in the prestige of professional work. Students, then, were radicalized from discontent developed after they left the universities to find work but failed to advance socially, thus illustrating how the experience of a loss in social mobility motivated student activism. Further, this chapter studies what both students and teachers labeled the undemocratic, aristocraticization of education. Stemming from the move towards the privatization of education and increased costs of university attendance, students condemned the fact that the quality of one's education was determined by income. Students feared losing access to the social prestige provided by a college education, but they were also troubled by the implications of increased tuition costs on the social mobility of the lower classes. An expanding middle class was important for their own class identity, as well as, the democratic society envisioned by students.

Inherent in the second chapter is a contradiction existent between the student's earlier class project and an emerging concern for the Mexican people. This inconsistency, however, is evidence of the complexity in the evolution of the student's political concerns and awareness, and further accentuates the importance of recognizing the diversity of radicalizing forces.⁵¹ As chapter three illustrates, in the late 1960s students sought to expand the scope of their movement

⁵¹ Some historians attempting to rationalize the contradictions inherent in the student movement have suggested that Mexican students reached out to the popular class as means of strengthening their movement and ensuring its continuation. Others rationalize the expansion of the movement's ideals as a natural progression towards the promotion of democracy in Mexico. For example, Gerard Degroot in an introductory essay to a collection of articles concerning student protest during the 1960s, suggests that in the West, and even more so in the East, students feel a general sense of responsibility to society. He explains that a "turning to the masses" occurred in student movements in Iran, France, South Korea, Germany, as well as, Mexico. However, he reasons that violent government repression of student activism in countries like Mexico, Iran, and South Korea, occurred once students had successfully gained popular support. Gerard J. Degroot, "The Culture of Protest: An Introductory Essay," in *Student Protest: The Sixties and After*, ed. Gerard J. Degroot (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998), 5-7; Mabry, 137; "Strike Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy: The Mexican Student Movement: Its Meaning and Perspectives," in *Mexico '68: The Students Speak* (New York: U.S. Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners, 1968): 8.

by demanding greater democracy for all Mexicans. This identification with the popular class reflects a broadening of activism as students began to shift away from university centered concerns towards a greater attention to the conditions and needs of México's workers. In correlation to the concern for equal access to education, students were also critical of the government's lack of social spending. Diminished social spending worsened the standards of living for many Mexicans. Sources from various political organizations, CNED, the Strike Committee, and North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)⁵² reveal that students demanded increased wages, tax reform, and reductions in foreign investments as a means for uplifting the standard of living for the Mexican people and reducing inequality.

Angered by economic and social inequality, students felt motivated to challenge México's single-party political system, led by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The final chapter explains how activists challenged México's concentration of political power within the executive branch, the ineffectiveness of unions, and the repression of oppositional forces. Understanding that the lower classes would continue to be marginalized in the absence of political representation, students called for the formation of a political party for the masses to help restore democracy in México and diminish the influence of the bourgeoisie. Together these chapters strive to historicize student activism and move beyond analyzing the movement in terms of either a political or cultural project. Ultimately this study hopes to provide a more detailed understanding of student activism in México during the 1960s, illustrating that students were radicalized by a combination of economic, social, and political concerns.⁵³

⁵² NACLA was originally formed to investigate and report on the relationship between the United States and the Americas. NACLA provides an example of a transnational contact zone, initiated during the Cold War, between the U.S. and Latin Americans.

⁵³ The role of gender in youth radicalization is limited in this study. Both women and men were diligent activists and for many women involvement within the movement represented both a cultural and political challenge to traditional gender norms. However, within the structure of the movement gender norms were also often replicated—placing men in the majority of leadership positions and assigning women to tasks of preparing meals. Deborah Cohen and

A Brief Comment on Source Material

This study has relied on various primary source documents from student publications, strike councils, CNED, as well as newspaper articles and presidential commentary. These documents include both translated works and works in their original Spanish form. As a result of the historical concentration on the later student youth movement, the bulk of these sources are from 1968. These sources, however, when examined carefully illustrate that students were commenting on an array of conditions in México beyond reactions to police brutality. Central to this study has been the work of former student activists, most importantly Pablo Gonzales Casanova. Published after the height of student protest in 1968, Gonzales Casanova's book *Democracy in México* has provided deep insight into the social demands of the student movement. Equally important was the CNED publication on democratic reform within education. This publication captures student disaffection over economic development and the supremacy of foreign business interests within México.

Contributions from a number of secondary sources have also been central for developing a foundation from which to understand the context of student activism. In particular, Donald Mabry's work on the relationship between student affairs and the Mexican government helps to elucidate concerns over university autonomy and the 1966 UNAM crisis. Focusing on economic development in México, David Lorey offers an important explanation of the impact of economic development on enrollment and job availability. Also to supplement Gonzales Casanova's study, Judith Hellman provides a leftist critique of conditions in México, focusing particularly on the social state of México.

Lessie Jo Frazier's essay, "Defining the Space of Mexico '68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and 'Women' in the streets," provides a detailed discussion of gender and youth activism.

CHAPTER 1 University Centered Activism and Demands for Autonomy

“It is not possible to continue tolerating the control of the university by a small coterie of men who are the sole managers of the money of the people and the consciousness of the youth.” –*El Sol de México*⁵⁴

Andrés Montaña Sánchez, a dedicated mathematics student, boarded the bus every morning at five a.m. for a two-hour ride to campus. His bus ride to and from school totaled four hours and cost his parents twelve pesos every day.⁵⁵ Most students, like Andrés, were dependent on reliable and affordable bus transportation to and from school. Consequently, proposed rate increases, announced in August of 1958 angered students.⁵⁶ Privately owned bus companies sought to cover repairs, while also accruing a large profit margin by raising bus rates.⁵⁷ In response students began to mobilize in opposition to the unaffordable rate increases. On August 22, 1958 students from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) occupied and burned a local bus terminal, and absconded with over sixty buses.⁵⁸ In the days following students from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional, as well as, teachers and workers aligned with UNAM students, started participating in mass demonstrations. However, by August 30th the coalition feared military intervention and began negotiating with the bus companies and the government. Students agreed to a temporary suspension on the rate increases in exchange for a transportation commission to ensure improved service while also providing the students with representation.⁵⁹

Mobilization against unjust bus fares provides an early example of student activism rooted in educational concerns, particularly access to education. This example of student

⁵⁴ “University Chaos,” *El Sol de Mexico* (April 28, 1966), in *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations*, ed. Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 329.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 27.

⁵⁶ The bus system was central, in part, because UNAM was removed from the city center to the outlying districts.

⁵⁷ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 210.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 210.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 211-212.

organization is illustrative of the majority of activism prior to 1968, which stemmed most commonly from university matters, a fact that is often overlooked in the larger narrative of student activism in 1968 México.⁶⁰ The purpose of this chapter is to provide greater depth to our understanding of the student youth movement by recognizing the educational concerns that mobilized youth to participate in protests. In contrast to previous historiography this discussion illustrates that educational concerns were in fact intricately linked to the formation of a political consciousness for students. Drawing attention first to the crisis at UNAM in 1966, sources including newspaper articles and a written reflection from UNAM graduate, Rafael Segovia, reveal that changes to education requirements, entrance exams, and course content ignited student mobilization against the rector of UNAM.

Secondly, this chapter examines demands for academic freedom within the University as a radicalizing force, relying particularly on publications from Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos (CNED). Continuously from 1966 through 1968 students found themselves in a struggle for autonomy from university administrators, the state, and business interests, repeatedly organizing to demand greater representation within university governance, as well as, academic freedom. Students desired the freedom to choose from an array of classes that would foster individuality, while also creating a well-rounded citizenry. In order to accomplish this, students envisioned a college education, which served the public good, rather than business interests by providing courses rich in culture, political thought, and scientific investigation. Students also adamantly protested the violent denial of institutional autonomy from state intervention during

⁶⁰ In 1920, following the conclusion of the armed stages of the Mexican Revolution, students from the Universidad Nacional created the Federación de Estudiantes del Distrito Federal. This organization served as a vehicle for the expression of student interests and demands for changes to academic standards, improved living conditions, and greater access to health and food services. César Sepúlveda, president of UNAM's law school contends that the government granted university autonomy in response to student protest against the frequency of tests. Decades later, in 1956 students from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) organized a student walk-out in an attempt to assert their right to better dormitories, increased buses, and greater student participation in university governance. Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 208; Sepúlveda, 385.

the military invasion of 1968, which this chapter concludes with. Thus, by historicizing the student youth movement, we see that educational concerns constituted a radicalizing force during the 1960s and that these concerns reflect a desire among students to foster a political consciousness by means of an improved educational experience.

I Rector Ignacio Chávez: The 1966 UNAM Crisis

In 1961 after being elected rector of UNAM, Ignacio Chávez instituted an expansive reform program. Chávez recognized that conditions at UNAM were deteriorating as a result of rising enrollment, which had increased 820 percent since 1929.⁶¹ Such high enrollments diminished funds available for full time teacher salaries, consequently increasing teacher-student ratios and limiting funds available for academic research. Responding to this, Chávez discontinued automatic admittance to university schools and programs, instituting exams and grade standards as a determinant for acceptance.⁶² Additionally, Chávez restructured the curriculum of México's national preparatory school, Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (ENP), requiring students to be enrolled for three years rather than two, in an attempt to better prepare students for university level work.⁶³

Chávez's strong conviction for academic discipline and excellence generated substantial condemnation and outrage from students. Reflecting on the tensions at UNAM, Rafael Segovia criticized Chávez for instituting reforms without consideration of alternative perspectives, suggesting that his authoritarian posture towards UNAM governance led him into direct conflict with others.⁶⁴ Segovia explains that newly reformed curriculum generated unrest among

⁶¹ Dr. Ignacio Chavez, "Formal Resignation of the Rector" *Excelsior*, April 30, 1966; Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 215.

⁶² Chavez, 215; Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 223.

⁶³ Mabry, 223.

⁶⁴ Rafael Segovia, "Mexican Politics and the University Crisis" in *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations*, ed. Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 313.

preparatory professors who opposed the necessary re-training, along with the concomitant reduction in access to university degrees.⁶⁵ Criticism also came from preparatory students who largely objected to admission exams, demanding that preparatory school students should be guaranteed admission.⁶⁶ Students from UNAM's Law School also opposed Chávez's reforms. Jose Luis Alonos led a group of his fellow law students to protest the election of the new director of the Law School, César Sepúlveda, who they viewed as an equally stringent academic. The protestors declared a strike and threatened to take control of the law school. However, twelve days later the protest faded after Alonos and four other students were expelled.⁶⁷

The president of the Law Student Society, Rodolfo Flores Urquiza, joined with preparatory students in organizing a movement within ENP to demand the discontinuation of entrance exams and the extended three-year curriculum. Urquiza also insisted upon salary increases for teachers. In support of these demands, law students published a manifesto to circulate student concerns within the law school. The manifesto recognized the problem of *irregularidades*, students who failed to regularly attend class and earn a university degree.⁶⁸ However, the manifesto asserts that makeup exams intended to "regularize" students were unfair and ineffective because the tests were scheduled without consideration of student circumstances, thus asserting the need for greater participation of students in decision making processes. The manifesto also complained of the failure of professors to appear in class, suggesting an inadequacy in teacher-student ratios, a problem Chávez was attempting to address. Foremost, the manifesto embodied a denunciation of César Sepúlveda and his role as director of the law school.

⁶⁵ Segovia, 314.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 319.

⁶⁷ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 224.

⁶⁸ Katsiaficas, 92. The decreasing rate of students completing their studies and graduating was a reoccurring problem, voiced by other student movements globally. For example, students protesting in Paris condemned dropout rates as being one of the many consequences of overcrowding in schools.

Reminiscent of Rafael Segovia's criticisms of Chávez, the students claimed Sepúlveda ruled the law school as a dictator, failing eighty percent of students and unjustly firing over fifteen professors. The students also contended that Sepúlveda fired professors and expelled students with differing political views or who posed a challenge to his authority.⁶⁹ Ultimately these demands were compiled into a petition given to Chávez in early March 1966. Though the petition embodied demands emanating from the law school, as the days unfolded students from other programs and prep schools expressed their support and supplemented the petition with additional concerns.

Chávez's failure to take satisfactory action in accordance with the petition promoted the escalation of student protest. On March 14, 1966 the students from the Law School accompanied by economics students organized a university strike, and the following day occupied the law school building. Chávez, however, refused to capitulate and continued to deny students their demands. In response students proposed a national strike on April 20, 1966 that would include twenty-eight law schools from around the nation. An article published in *Política* explains that students from both the law and economics schools, along with various preparatory schools, and other universities and departments throughout México joined together to form a democratic council that would be more representative of a national student body. This council adopted the name, Consejo Estudiantil Universitario (CEU).⁷⁰

In Rafael Segovia's account of the 1966 crisis he reasons that most students shared the desire for the "acceleration and simplification" of studies, requesting flexibility in course

⁶⁹ Mabry, 227; Segovia, 314-316.

⁷⁰ "Qué es en realidad, lo que ha sucedido en la Universidad Nacional?" *Política* 145 (May 1, 1966), in *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations*, ed. Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 333.

assignments.⁷¹ Additionally, students expressed a need for democratic governance within the university, including a greater say for students in decision-making.⁷² On April 26th student activism at UNAM climaxed, ending in the resignation of rector Chávez. Frustrated by unsettled demands, students surrounded the rectory. After being refused entrance into the building one student, Francisco Villaloba, entered through a window and was attacked by a police officer. Students responding to the Villaloba's beating, stormed the building and took Chávez and other administrators captive. Six hours later Chávez resigned from his position as rector.⁷³

Throughout the crisis that culminated in Chávez's resignation, many observers voiced concern that student activism was ignited by outside forces. Sepúlveda refused to respond to student demands, contending that non-university interests were responsible for the movement.⁷⁴ In May of 1966 *Política* published an article claiming that government forces wanted Chávez, a political adversary, removed from office, and thus manipulated students to gain access to the rectory.⁷⁵ These accusations, however, serve to undermine the educational concerns motivating student activism. To imply that students were simply instruments of government manipulation obscures student disaffection with university matters, such as entrance exams, extended curriculum, and student representation within the administration. Further, the attempt at organizing a national strike and the formation of CEU is illustrative of an expansive discontent among student populations outside of UNAM, suggesting that there was more to activism than

⁷¹ Segovia, 316.

⁷² Mabry, 232; Segovia, 316.

⁷³ UNAM's governing board refused this initial resignation on the grounds that it was issued under duress. However, a few days later Chávez issued a formal resignation, and Javier Barros Sierra was named the new rector. Mabry, 231.

⁷⁴ César Sepúlveda, "Student Participation in University Affairs: The Mexican Experience," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 17:3 (Summer, 1969): 388; In addition to this assertion, at the end of September 1966, four students withdrew from the fight committee following allegations that the movement had been taken over by outsiders. Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 230.

⁷⁵ "Qué es en realidad..." 334.

government dislike for Chávez. Rather than attempting to dismiss student activism as merely external agitation, the crisis that unfolded at UNAM and throughout México's universities in 1966 should be seen as an early stage in the student youth movement. By expanding the history of student activism to include 1966, we see that educational concerns were in fact a primary radicalizing force of the student youth movement in the years preceding 1968.

II Autonomy and Inadequacies within University Education

By examining more closely the forces radicalizing students, autonomy becomes deeply engrained within educational concerns. During the 1966 crisis at UNAM, students desired representation within decision-making processes so that they could be active participants in shaping the education system. This concern continued to be voiced throughout the 1960s. As illustrated in a publication presented by CNED members, academic freedom was a point of contention. Activists challenged the influence of economic development on university programs and demanded access to courses which served to foster a socially educated and politically enlightened student body. Thus, autonomy for many students represented the desire to freely develop a political consciousness through university education, consequently, challenging most historical narratives of the student youth movement, which focus discussions of autonomy on the condemnation of military intervention.

Historically, autonomy has been central to discussions concerning the relationship between education and the state. The university constituted a central component of the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution. Entrenched in plans for economic development, the university was to be responsive to the demands of the economy, producing professionals to meet the needs of state interests. Consequently, state interests dictated the direction of university

education.⁷⁶ University students largely selected career paths based on the country's economic development, rather than personal interest. In 1929, however, tensions between students and university officials erupted, forcing President Emilio Portes Gil to grant México's National University autonomy in an effort to avoid greater conflict.⁷⁷ This decision denied the government direct intervention within the university and granted the right to independently determine programs of study and teaching methodology. However, the newly gained autonomy had its limitations. The government maintained control of the appointment of the rector and also remained in control of finances.⁷⁸ On account of the university reliance on federal funding, a dependent relationship endured, constricting the actual degree of institutional autonomy.⁷⁹

Autonomy was again limited in 1944 with the passage of the Organic Law, largely reversing the gains won in 1929. The first article of the Organic Law officially declares UNAM to be a decentralized state agency, responsible for training professionals, researchers, and technicians needed by society.⁸⁰ Autonomy, then, rested on the university's commitment to the government's development plans. In return for the university's support, the government would not interfere in the regulation of enrollment, academic standards, or plans of study as long as the university was attentive to restrictions established by the Ministry of Education. Additionally the

⁷⁶ David E. Lorey, *The University System and Economic Development in Mexico Since 1929* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1993), 2.

⁷⁷ Mabry, "The Mexican Government and Student Conflict," 3; Sepúlveda, 385; The strike at UNAM broke out in response to curricular dissatisfaction and because of the frequency of examinations.

⁷⁸ Mabry, 133; Students were allowed to elect representatives to school and university councils and to participate in the election of administrators.

⁷⁹ Rector Sierra stated that the university was still autonomous, at least in the letters of the law, "but its budget is covered largely with federal funding and may be exercised on all sorts of pressures;" "Presenta su renuncia irrevocable el rector de la universidad; Barros Sierra dimite, instando a la cordura; ha tropezado con "incomprension y encono" de adentro y de afuera," *Excelsior*, September 23, 1968 in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968: documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/266.

⁸⁰ Article one reads, "The National Autonomous University of Mexico is a public corporation—a decentralized agency of the State—endowed with the full legal capacity to provide higher education aimed at training professionals, researchers, academics and technicians useful to society; to organize and conduct research, mainly about the conditions and problems of the nation, and to extend as widely as possible the benefits of culture." "The Organic Law of UNAM," UNAM, accessed August 7, 2011, <http://www.dgelu.unam.mx/m2.htm>.

Organic Law also reformed the administrative structure of UNAM, creating a governing board, Junta de Gobierno. The Junta was responsible for filling vacancies, a change that greatly diminished the influence of students and professors on the election process and representation within the university in general. Junta members consisted primarily of alumni, not teachers and students.⁸¹

Students and professors who coveted academic freedom came to resent the government's dictate for the primacy of economic development in university education. Students began to associate government intrusion into academics with a crisis in higher education. CNED argued that there existed a disconnect between higher education and the interest and needs of México's youth, asserting, "...the crisis of higher education can be defined as the complete dissociation of what higher education is and what it produces, from the educational needs of youth, the type of education necessary for independent economic development, and the social and political progress of the Mexican people."⁸² Therefore, CNED first observes that students, because of the influence of outside forces, were inhibited from following their desired educational paths, which in turn generated an alarming crisis in education. This crisis was marked by school dropout rates, inadequate quality of teaching, and a backwardness of curriculum.⁸³ CNED recorded that only one in three students succeeded in completing their studies, and in 1963 forty-four percent of students dropped out before earning a degree.⁸⁴ Overtime, students recognized that the

⁸¹ "The Organic Law of UNAM," UNAM, accessed August 7, 2011, <http://www.dgelu.unam.mx/m2.htm>; Mabry 190.

⁸² Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democratización de la enseñanza: documentos del primer Seminario Nacional*, (Fondo de Cultura Popular, 1969), 20.

⁸³ Donald Mabry in his book, *The Mexican University and the State*, examines expenditure per student, teacher-student ratios, and full time versus part time faculty, in effort to understand if there was, in fact, a drop in the quality of Mexico's educational system. Interestingly, he concluded that there was no immediate decrease in quality between 1929 and 1980. Rather, expenditures, student-teacher ratios, and faculty pay illustrated that there was more of a "leveling off" of increases in quality during the 1940s. This leveling off evolved into a gradual decline in quality continuing from the 1950s. Mabry, *Mexico University and the State*, 118-119.

⁸⁴ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democratización*, 33.

disassociation generated by outside influences failed to foster academic success and ultimately to provide students with the education necessary for economic growth, as well as, the social and political advancement of Mexican society as a whole.

Vocational guidance was partly to blame according to CNED. Counselors guided students towards jobs needed by commercial, industrial, and agricultural production, rather than encouraging students to follow career paths conducive to their aptitudes and preferences. CNED members felt that guidance offered to students was more reflective of a concern for the needs of employers rather than the needs of the children and Mexican society.⁸⁵ Vocational guidance accompanied by inadequate curriculum inhibited students from assuming their proper role in society, which according to CNED was to become a productive force.⁸⁶ CNED reasoned, in order to allow students to become contributors to society, education required modernization towards greater scientific content. Students should be encouraged to advance and share scientific developments to help production within the Mexican economy.

However, the crisis in education necessitated more than the elevation of scientific study. CNED explained that at the time education, responding to the needs of companies, centered exclusively on technical training, asserting “[education] is intended only to train technicians.”⁸⁷ This training was absent of political or social thought. CNED challenged this exclusion, stating that the crisis in education can only be remedied with a qualitative development of scientific study that is closely tied to the problems and needs of Mexican people and society.⁸⁸ Thus, CNED was not proposing simply a unilateral solution of the escalation of scientific instruction; rather, students had a responsibility to contribute to the future of Mexican society through both

⁸⁵ Ibid, 34.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 23-24.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 35.

scientific and humanistic study. CNED instructed, “A graduate and an intellectual are both responsible for their obligations to society and culture.”⁸⁹ A function of education, then, is also to help students assume their role as producers and preservers of cultural knowledge.⁹⁰

Reflected in CNED writings, these students understood the crisis in education to be related not only to poor guidance and inadequacies in course content, but also to the penetration of outside forces within the education system. The intrusion of business or imperialist pressures, both foreign and domestic, contributed most significantly to the crisis in education. CNED believed that business concerns influenced education in such a way as to inhibit the advancement of a well-rounded curriculum rooted in both scientific and humanistic instruction. Unscientific texts and course programs were instituted so as to avoid content that could incite critical thought and inspire students to question economic relations. These measures students asserted, “...close the path to social and scientific critique.”⁹¹ Further, CNED contended that the bourgeoisie aimed to inhibit in institutions of higher education, “objective analysis of our country’s problems and

⁸⁹ Ibid, 40.

⁹⁰ As previously mentioned in the introduction of this study, students also demonstrated their desire to “preserve” Mexico’s cultural heritage in a protest against the Cultural Institute in Morelia, Michoacán in 1961. Eric Zolov states that the Cultural Institute was an integral component of the U.S. Cold War project, explaining that the institute’s purpose was largely to disseminate cultural knowledge. The institute promoted activities centered on the sharing of U.S. customs and culture in an attempt to foster “understanding” between the U.S. and Mexico, and also to solidify a strong Pan-American relationship. However, following the Bay of Pigs invasion, high school students from the Colegio de San Nicolas de Hidalgo, raided the institute and burned the majority of the contents inside. One of the motivations for this demonstration was to express solidarity with Cuba in opposition to the United States. This display of student radicalism was also motivated by a strain of nationalism within Mexico, and the determination to promote a national history of “heroic anti-imperialism” embodied in the figures of Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, rather than a history centered on a friendship between U.S. and Mexico.

This event illustrates that the demand for an education that aided in the preservation of Mexico’s cultural heritage was important not only for college students, but high school youth as well. The raid of the Cultural Institute also unveils an early transnational encounter within the student movement. Students stood in solidarity with the Cuban people against the U.S. invasion and U.S. imperialism more generally. However, later in the student movement, leaders discouraged the promotion of iconic figures such as Che and Castro, to counter attempts made by the government to delegitimize student activism by suggesting that the movement was influenced by foreigners. Further, the role of culture within these various political projects—Cold War tensions and the U.S. effort to expand its influence globally, student solidarity with Cuba, and nationalist impulses—illustrate the interconnection between political and cultural realms, particularly within transnational encounters. Zolov, “Cuba Si, Yanquis No!” 214-254.

⁹¹ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 42.

suggestions for paths towards solving these problems.”⁹² Ultimately, according to these students, imperialist and government forces aspired to use education as a means of securing the position of business elite in society by limiting the content of education and political agency of students. Gustavo Gordillo, a delegate for the Student Strike Committee, astutely comments on the contradiction surrounding the role of education and students within society. Expressing his frustration he writes, “We are continually told, ‘You are the future of the country.’ But we are constantly denied any opportunity to act and participate in the political decisions that are being made today... We want to and ARE ABLE to participate today, not when we are seventy years old.”⁹³ By implication then, university education not only intended to inhibit students from analyzing the problems of society but also prevented students from becoming a force for change.

The removal of political institutions and content from higher education was condemned by students. CNED proclaimed, “We express our disagreement with this position and consider it to be a harmful, undemocratic, and completely unscientific distortion of the youth, and also the cause of much frustration.”⁹⁴ These students understood the attempt to restrict the ideological depth of Mexico’s youth as being not only unscientific, but also apolitical, and inevitably giving rise to an undemocratic environment. Similar complaints were made throughout the 1960s as students protested the right to belong to a political body. In 1966 a newspaper article published by *El Sol de México*, laments the transformation of UNAM, stating that it was once an institution open to “all currents of thought” but was increasing becoming “implacably closed.”⁹⁵ The article continued, stating that bourgeois interests were constricting the avenues for ideological

⁹² Ibid, 51-52.

⁹³ Poniatowska, 9.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 26.

⁹⁵ “University Chaos,” 329.

expression, ultimately solidifying a “bourgeois democracy” within UNAM.⁹⁶ In accordance with this statement both Chávez and Sepúlveda sought to curtail political activity of students, arguing that the purpose of university attendance was to study, not to partake in political debate.⁹⁷

Students condemned the apolitical education promoted by university administrators, challenging the current system, which they understood to be serving the interests of economic development at the expense of individual growth and the public good.⁹⁸ This was one important reason why CNED recognized the need for student representation within university governance, so students could ensure the freedom to study according to their own interests and goals. Further, student activists envisioned a society strengthened by university attendance. In this society education benefited public interests by creating a productive and politically conscious citizenry. In terms of productivity, increased scientific study would allow for a more diverse and advanced labor force, strengthening the Mexican economy and the Mexican workforce as well. The demand for political content was also intended to serve society by creating an educated body of politically active individuals. Students believed these individuals to be central to the preservation of democratic practice, and that the act of limiting such content would challenge the ideals of popular government. Ultimately then, students conceived of educational concerns in relation to the greater society. Thus, these concerns were not simply a self-serving motivation, but rather, should be understood as a political project intended to engender democratic practice within Mexico.

⁹⁶ “The Fall of the Rector: A Student Perspective,” in *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations*, ed. Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 321.

⁹⁷ Sepúlveda, 385.

⁹⁸ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 190-191. Mabry suggests that by complicating the governing system, the government intended to depoliticize UNAM so that it could better fulfill its teaching and research mission.

III A Violation of Autonomy: Military Intrusions during 1968

In addition to government intrusions into academics, direct challenges to university autonomy presented by military intervention generated substantial criticism from students, motivating students to join the movement. In the months leading up to the 1968 massacre, the military repeatedly invaded various campuses. On July 29, 1968 the military had been ordered to remove students from the streets of the city center and to occupy and take control of Preparatory School 1 of UNAM. Claiming that students had refused to leave the building and had become aggressive, the military and *granaderos* discontinued negotiations and invaded the school. Firing an explosive bazooka at the antique Baroque doors of the school, the police entered, detained 126 students, and occupied the building. By 2 a.m. the following day, police forces had occupied four preparatory schools and one vocational school.⁹⁹ Margarita Nolasco explains that challenges to autonomy continued into September, recalling witnessing a violent police crackdown. She remembers, “At about three in the afternoon on September 3, six buses full of *granaderos*—three hundred of them—pulled up at Vocational 7 to occupy the school...The *granaderos* started throwing tear-gas grenades...”¹⁰⁰ Margarita proceeds to explain how she and other students fled from the building through an exterior exit, where some students began to battle with the *granaderos*.

The military’s disavowal of university autonomy did not simply generate a physically aggressive response. Rather, most students chose a more peaceful form of activism and were inspired to organize to demand that the government respect institutional autonomy. This effort is manifest in the writings of various activist organizations. For example, the Consejo Nacional de Huelga wrote on September 26, 1968 that the occupation of school buildings by the army

⁹⁹ Carey, 49-50; Judith Hellman, *México in Crisis* (New York: Homes and Meier, 1983), 173.

¹⁰⁰ Poniatswaska, 266.

impacted not only the functioning of the university programs and facilities but also violated the “core organic structure of UNAM,” which they stated as being the university’s autonomy.¹⁰¹ The council also labeled the military’s actions as “illegal.” This is illustrative of a current among student activists and supporters who interpreted the events in terms of constitutionality. The Communist Party issued a manifesto in support of student demands, calling Mexicans to defend the constitutional rights of free speech, assembly, and demonstration.¹⁰² The National Strike Committee in a letter to Bertrand Russell also exhibits concern over constitutionality, asserting that the granaderos were an “unconstitutional” anti-riot squad and served the purpose of repression rather than keeping the peace.¹⁰³

Rector Javier Barros Sierra also supported the student’s critique of the military’s actions, arguing that the troop’s aggressive confrontation and the government’s occupation of the school transformed UNAM. The Rector went so far as to resign from his position, stating, “In these circumstances, I can no longer serve the university, but prove to be an obstacle for it.”¹⁰⁴ Both the Strike Council and the Rector openly protested the intrusion of government forces because the military action challenged the autonomous nature of UNAM. These students along with Barros Sierra recognized that the school could not function properly under military occupation, and that without autonomy students could not carry on with their studies as usual, nor could Barros Sierra govern.

¹⁰¹ Consejo Nacional de Huelga, “Al pueblo: adhesión al rector,” *Excelsior*, September 25, 1968 in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/269.

¹⁰² Partido Comunista Mexicano, “Manifiesto,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/76.

¹⁰³ Donald Mabry explains that the Granaderos were a controversial force since their founding in 1944 because they tended to act in effort to suppress opposition and dissident movements rather than the corps stated purpose of riot control. Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 238.

¹⁰⁴ “Presenta su renuncia irrevocable el rector de la Universidad...” 4/266.

While students denounced military intrusions, they also organized in opposition, generating support not only from students but non-students as well. In a second statement by the Strike Council, members affirmed that a “democratic response” has been generated in the wake of violence, instructing students not to be “intimidated” by the “illegal” military presence, but rather to take to the streets in protest.¹⁰⁵ In addition to the Strike Council other organization also demanded political participation in response to the loss of autonomy. In early August after the occupation of Preparatory School 1, the Communist Party of Mexico issued a second statement against the government actions, stating that the “military occupation” of University City constituted the most “serious attack” on university autonomy in some time.¹⁰⁶ In the same statement, the party called for the defense of institutional autonomy, declaring, “Join your voice to the growing clamor of indignation, and protest this government action...”¹⁰⁷

The Communist Party and the Strike Council’s appeal for political participation against government intrusion was met by students and intellectuals alike. Margarita Isabel, an actress from México’s National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA), proclaimed that the police intrusion into INBA was the direct cause of her activism. Margarita wrote, “I joined the student movement simply because one day the *granaderos* turned up at the INBA with police dogs and chains and hauled everybody off to jail. And the INBA hadn’t even come out and said whether it supported the Movement or not!”¹⁰⁸ Though Margarita was not enrolled in classes, she still felt compelled to enlist in the movement and provide support for the students. She explains that she and fellow actors and actresses collaborated in forming an “actor’s brigade” to advance the students’

¹⁰⁵ Consejo Nacional de Huelga, “Al pueblo y a los estudiantes de México,” *El Dia*, September 21, 1968 in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/256.

¹⁰⁶ Partido Comunista Mexicano, “Presidium del Comité Central,” *Excelsior*, September 20, 1968 in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/252.

¹⁰⁷ Partido Comunista Mexicano, “Presidium del Comité Central,” 4/252.

¹⁰⁸ Poniatswaska, 6.

cause.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, writing on behalf of an expansive list of individuals, Juan Rulfo and Juan Bañuelos affirmed the support of numerous intellectuals and artists. They openly criticized the violations of university autonomy, expressing outrage against the use of weapons on “unarmed” school buildings and people.¹¹⁰ In a show of solidarity with students, teachers, and the Strike Council this group of intellectuals chose to reproduce the list of the demands issued by the council, calling for the government to answer these dictates.¹¹¹

Interestingly, in response to the condemnation emanating from students and their supporters, government officials challenged how students’ defined the parameters of institutional autonomy. Published on August 3, 1968 in *El Heraldo de México*, former president Emilio Portes Gill directed students to the wording of the 1929 law in which he granted UNAM autonomy. He reminded students that the law did not transform the university into a “privileged extraterritoriality.” Rather, he argued, the university still resided within national boundaries, and was consequently under the law of the national government.¹¹² Further, Portes Gill instructed, “When criminal acts are committed within the premises of the university, the government has a duty to prevent such crimes.”¹¹³ Thus, the government maintained the right to intervene when “criminal acts” occur on campus and also had the right to intervene to prevent criminal acts from taking place. In agreement with Portes Gill, President Diaz Ordaz declared in a presidential address that the army and other “forces of public order” could not intervene in matters that were strictly university concerns. President Diaz Ordaz writes, “The army or other forces of the public order should not intervene to solve problems that are within the exclusive competence of the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹¹⁰ Juan Rulfo, “Protesta de intelectuales y artistas,” *El Dia, August 15, 1968* in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/121.

¹¹¹ Rulfo, 4/121.

¹¹² Emilio Portes Gill, *El Dia, August 4, 1968* in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/87.

¹¹³ Portes Gill, 4/87.

University and other institutions of higher education.”¹¹⁴ Essentially both presidents challenged how students interpreted the application of autonomy as a means to maintain the legality of recent actions taken by the government.¹¹⁵ Portes Gill and Diaz Ordaz reaffirmed the right of the government to intervene in order to uphold the law; in doing so they both classified the actions of students as “criminal” and constituting a dangerous threat to the national order.

The legality of government intervention aside, the principal critique of the students and their supporters was that the forceful violation of university autonomy was unjust and undemocratic. The image of armed police guards occupying campuses around University City challenged the democratic ideals supposedly embodied in the granting of institutional autonomy. As the sources above reveal students from UNAM and other universities and preparatory schools were driven to activism as a result of the attack on what they understood as university autonomy. In doing so these students assumed a politically active stance that challenged the expectations of Portes Gill and President Diaz Ordaz who considered academic study to be the primary responsibility of the students.¹¹⁶ This understanding helps to complicate the simple dichotomy of labeling youth activism as strictly cultural or political. While students’ demands were deeply rooted in the university experience, which may cause some to disregard the political quality of student activism, student protest, at the same time, also assumed a very political form, most obvious in the student critique of government actions.

¹¹⁴ Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, “Texto íntegro del IV informe presidencial,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/186.

¹¹⁵ Octavio Hernandez, “Definición, alcance y límites de la autonomía de la universidad,” *Siempre*, September 18, 1968 in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/244; Aside from government officials, other conservative voices also criticized the student’s opposition. Octavio Hernandez writing in the September 18, 1968 edition of *Siempre*, maintains that the Communist Party had infiltrated university campuses, and that the interference of these outside forces necessitated the involvement of the government. Hernandez further maintained that it was the responsibility of the government to remove these outside forces so as to secure the autonomy of the University. He also suggested that the Communist Party was the real threat to university autonomy.

¹¹⁶ Portes Gill, 4/87; Rulfo, 4/121.

Though military intervention and the presence of troops and tanks clearly generated substantial commentary and outrage from students, police brutality was not the sole motivating force for student activism. By expanding our focus beyond the central narrative of the Mexican student youth movement, this chapter illustrates that calls for autonomy had much deeper roots within the education system. Sources reveal that concerns for autonomy should be understood in terms of academic freedom. An education driven by the need to produce a labor force of technicians failed to serve Mexican society. Rather students desired the ability to expand the educational experience by incorporating scientific, cultural, and political courses of study. In this sense autonomy is also in reference to the freedom to develop political consciousness. Students recognized a greater role for themselves within society, as preservers of cultural heritage and democratic practice. Thus, the educational concerns radicalizing student activism in the 1960s, constitute a political project as students contend for the right to become political actors as a means for preserving a well-rounded, democratic society in Mexico.

CHAPTER 2 Struggling to Ascend the Social Ladder: Diminishing Employment Opportunities for College Graduates

“Ours is an economy with all the anarchy, wastefulness, and crisis of capitalism, an [economy] with rapid development of productive forces without a rash growth of productivity, without a “technical revolution,” or complete industrialization of the country.” –CNED¹¹⁷

“For a democratic education in a democratic México.” CNED¹¹⁸

Cesar Sepúlveda wrote, “In a general sense it can be said that in México the university, and specifically UNAM, is bound directly to the society it serves.¹¹⁹ Students experienced this reality in recognizing the influence of the government and business elites on educational content and university governance. However, economic forces continued to shape the lives of students even after leaving the university. Young student activist, Gustavo Gordillo, captures this reality, observing, “...young peasants, workers, and students are facing a very dim future, since job opportunities are being created for the benefit of special interests rather than society as a whole.”¹²⁰ Gordillo’s indignation is representative of the fact that graduates were increasingly unable to find professional employment. Students like Gordillo and members of CNED interpreted the deficiency in job opportunities as being related to the influence of business interests within the economy. These interests distorted the direction of the economy so that society’s needs surrounding employment were not being met.

This chapter focuses on unmet employment needs as a radicalizing force for student unrest. To understand the situation confronting college graduates this chapter first examines enrollment statistics and incentives to increase the outflow of college graduates, illustrating that students were graduating in increasing numbers. Despite these expanding numbers, however, the

¹¹⁷ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 11.

¹¹⁸ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, “Encuentro Nacional de Dirigentes Estudiantiles,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/125.

¹¹⁹ Sepúlveda, 384.

¹²⁰ Poniatswaska, 8.

economy was unsuccessful in keeping pace with the number of graduates, resulting in a tight job market for professional degree holders. Secondly, this chapter explores how México's economic development directly shaped employment options by generating little need for professional level training. Without acquiring work, students failed to attain social mobility generally understood to accompany professional employment and a university degree. This dissatisfaction was also at the root of student activism, illustrating that youth became radicalized not simply by educational concerns but also by concerns for their material futures. The final topic addressed in this chapter is student condemnation of the aristocratization of education and the increasing costs of attending college. Thus, within the movement, student activism was driven by a class project to secure professional training and employment, and ultimately a position in the middle class for themselves and all Mexicans.

Students throughout the 1960s felt the impacts of a competitive job market. For example, Rafael Segovia attributes the unrest among law students during the 1966 UNAM crisis as being rooted in the competitiveness of the law profession. He writes, "Lawyers are especially sensitive to their uncertain future...In administration, in private business, in politics, in diplomacy, and so forth, he has to face an over abundance of others with law diplomas, as well as competition from economists and degree holders from various other faculties of the social sciences."¹²¹ Important in Segovia's comment is the recognition of the repercussions of increased enrollment on professional employment. Statistics gathered from David Lorey's scholarly investigation of México's educational system helps to explain the experience of law graduates and other students during the 1960s. These statistics illustrate that Mexican youth were graduating from universities in numbers that overwhelmed professional employment opportunities, meaning that the economy did not have a great enough need for professional level training to meet the demand of graduates.

¹²¹ Segovia, 316.

In the 1930s, the number of degrees granted by Mexican universities per one million inhabitants grew by 75 percent, and in the next ten years degrees grew by 64.2 percent. Despite a small decrease during the 1950s, by the 1960s degrees granted per million inhabitants had increased by 118.5 percent.¹²²

A number of factors contributed to the increases in enrollments and graduate degrees. Originally there was a perceived need for professionals in industry, leading the government to subsidize education to stimulate economic development. Government subsidies then allowed universities to have relatively low costs of attendance, which augmented the number of people aspiring to pursue professional level training. Further, students attending secondary schools were motivated by the proliferation of college-preparatory programs to enroll at the university and pursue professional studies. Students also played a central role in the expansion of enrollment through their demands for open and free education. As illustrated in the crisis leading up to the resignation of Ignacio Chávez students actively protested entrance exams and grade standardizations, measures that would restrict admissions. Consequently administrators and government officials seeking to placate student activism and prevent unrest were swayed to keep costs low and allow for open admissions. These factors combined generated an increase in the number of students and ultimately of degrees granted, resulting in a corresponding increase in the number of professional degree holders seeking to enter or maintain their position within the middle class. However, the economy challenged this quest because there was little need for highly skilled labor, and thus many graduates could not find professional work. This inability to gain professional employment generated unrest among students, fearing the loss of the social

¹²² Lorey, 52-53; Important to note, these increases in degrees granted do not simply reflect an increase in population. Between 1928 and 1989 the Mexican population grew 2.8 percent per year, the annual rate of degrees granted according to Lorey was 4.9 percent.

status granted to professionals. Consequently students were driven to challenge the current system in an effort to secure their class identities.

II Economic Development and the Need for Professional Employment

The scarcity of professional jobs felt by students was a concomitant implication of the economic policy pursued by México's leaders. Beginning in the 1940s after the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, rapid industrialization became the cornerstone of Mexico's plan for economic development.¹²³ Key components of the nation's industrial design, mainly protection from competition, reliance on capital-intensive equipment, and government-sponsored employment reduced the number of professional jobs available for graduates. Students writing for CNED were cognizant of the implications of poor development policies on the economy and the job market, astutely voicing their disaffection.

Beginning in the late 1930s, restrictions were implemented against U.S. imports in an attempt to eliminate competition and protect Mexican industry. Import licensing and high tariffs served to limit the amount of foreign goods entering México and accelerate the expansion of manufacturing. Tax incentives and exceptionally low interest rates offered to Mexican companies also minimized competition. These practices continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s, allowing for Mexican companies to produce goods that had once been imported, stimulating the growth of manufacturing.¹²⁴ However, in reducing both domestic and foreign competition, protective policies had implications for the technological development within México. CNED claimed that the Mexican economy was undergoing a structural crisis, which they attributed, in part, to the failure to fully industrialize owing to the fact that there was never a

¹²³ Cárdenas focused more specifically on land reform and the subsidization of goods and services.

¹²⁴ David E. Lorey, *The Rise of Professions In 20th Century Mexico: University Graduates and Occupational Change since 1929* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1992), 4; Hellman 63.

“technical revolution.”¹²⁵ The “revolution” failed to materialize because with the elimination of competition there existed little incentive to institute new, more efficient equipment.¹²⁶

Correspondingly, investments were not directed towards research and technological development since there was minimal need for modernization of manufacturing equipment or increased efficiency. Thus, the need for professional level education and training traditionally necessary for innovation was negligible and failed to generate professional level jobs to meet the demand of graduates. The structural economic crisis as identified by CNED, directly affected university graduates who struggled to find work.

Compounding employment shortfalls, the majority of factories in México imported industrial equipment from the United States, Europe, and Japan.¹²⁷ CNED was critical of this practice, arguing that Mexico imported, “...the necessary parts for ensuring and maintaining the functioning of current industry and the technical research needed to ensure [México’s] rapid development.”¹²⁸ These students understood México’s dependence on foreign markets for the formation of a developed economy as contributing to the economic crisis.¹²⁹ Further, the importation of machinery from abroad indicated that Mexican factories were being modeled after their U.S. and European counterparts. Historian Judith Hellman contends that this was highly problematic because Mexican factories came to rely on capital-intensive machinery, like those in the U.S. However, capital-intensive production is utilized as a means to save labor costs in economies where the cost of labor is high and capital is more readily available. Yet the reverse defines México’s economy, labor is relatively cheap and capital is less abundant. Therefore,

¹²⁵ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 11.

¹²⁶ Lorey explains that most technology used in industrial plants in the 1980s continued to be obsolete or lagging behind state of the art innovations.

¹²⁷ Lorey, *The Rise of Professions*, 38.

¹²⁸ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 13.

¹²⁹ Hellman, 68; Hellman states that machinery, chemicals, and semi-processed manufactured goods constitute 80 percent of imports.

México should have been utilizing manpower rather than machinery acquired through the accumulation of debt.¹³⁰

CNED students recognized the failure of Mexican industry, observing, “[Mexico’s] production is detached from the real needs of the environment in which it is established, thus eliminating the maximum utilization of national technical research.”¹³¹ Mexican industry developed in relation to foreign manufacturing design, rather than with consideration to the context and “needs” of its environment. By implication, these students opine, industry is not employing México’s technical and research capabilities. One obvious ramification of this is that employment does not expand along with industrialization. Consequently fewer Mexican laborers are employed, and also fewer professional positions are created.¹³² As suggested by the students, research and professional level technical ability needed to produce machinery and capital goods takes place in other countries, and thus the need for professional knowledge is diminished along with the jobs such production would generate.¹³³

Relating México’s dependency on foreign markets to deficiencies in the job market, CNED comments on the intrusion of imperialist forces within México. These students contend that México’s lack of economic independence is visibly illustrated in the loss of professional work, writing, “Tasks do not arise for professionals to participate in finding solutions to the major problems of the nation.”¹³⁴ CNED continues, explaining that the inability to apply

¹³⁰ Hellman, 69-70. Judith Hellman references petroleum production, explaining that fewer than 200,000 workers are employed in petroleum production, an industry that generates billions of dollars. Further, in certain development phases of the oil industry she notes, “only one new job was created for every 250,000 dollars of capital invested;” Hellman, 70.

¹³¹ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 14.

¹³² The misuse of capital-intensive production rather than labor-intensive production not only fails to provide jobs, but also results in the accumulation of debt, which only exacerbates Mexico’s economic crisis.

¹³³ Lorey, *The University System and Economic...*, 96; David Lorey explains the auto industry is illustrative of this reality. Because the majority of auto-related research is imported from the U.S., Japan, and Europe, the Mexican auto industry is not a primary employer of professionals like it is in other industrial advanced countries.

¹³⁴ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 51.

Mexican intellectual, scientific, and technical training and knowledge to help utilize the nation's resources, is illustrative of the hold imperialists and business interests have not only the education system, but the economy as well.¹³⁵ Consequently, economic dependence is directly related to the ability to employ and apply professional knowledge. Thus, by determining job availability, economic development was central to the student's concerns, particularly those concerned with class. As long as the economy failed to generate professional positions, the material future of students, and their middle class identities rooted in professional employment remained in question.

III From Professional to Technician: Stagnation and the Loss of Social Mobility

To the dismay of graduating students México's economic development forged an industry with a diminishing role for professionals. The root cause of student anxiety, however, was more complex than simply the scarcity of employment opportunities. Students were also angered at the loss of social mobility. Gonzales Casanova, one of the many leaders of the student youth movement, asserts that vertical mobility and the prospects of ascending to a higher class was believed to be a reality that led many Mexicans to trust that there was hope for individual improvement. University education and the degrees earned constituted one of the primary vehicles for upward mobility.¹³⁶ In fact, it was the social responsibility of the university system to promote social ascension by providing students with the advanced training necessary to gain professional employment. In turn, professional employment ideally provided students with higher income and social networks to advance to the middle and upper class.¹³⁷ President Lázaro Cárdenas helped solidify the relationship between the university and social mobility by

¹³⁵ Ibid, 51.

¹³⁶ Larissa Lomnitz, "Conflict and Mediation in a Latin American University," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 19, no. 3 (Aug, 1977), 314; Pablo Gonzales Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico*, trans. Danielle Salti (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 113.

¹³⁷ Lorey, *The University System and Economic...*, 135.

expanding the opportunity for higher education to increasing numbers from the working class. In 1936 Cárdenas sponsored the establishment of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN), with the mission of providing lower class youth the chance to gain greater access to professional level training and employment. Along with IPN Cárdenas also sought to bolster the working class by promoting the creation of lower level technical programs. These were short-term programs, which reduced the cost of attendance allowing less financially secure students to enroll.¹³⁸

Cárdenas was furthering revolutionary goals by helping advance the lower classes through an increased access to education, ultimately securing the idea that social mobility was attainable through hard work and university education. Unfortunately Cárdenas' efforts fell short. One article published by the North American Congress on Latin America observed that students were increasingly seeing "the possibility for mobility decrease."¹³⁹ With diminishing opportunities for professional employment students struggled to find a means for economic advancement and alternative routes for social mobility. This is reflected in a letter to President Diaz Ordaz from José de las Fuentes Rodriguez, who wrote, "Today we fight to cultivate a better future."¹⁴⁰ The Mexican economy could not match the increasing number of university graduates seeking professional employment. Without access to professional employment students were unable to secure high-paying jobs to advance economically. Consequently, students worried about their positions within the middle class and their corresponding material futures.

David Lorey asserts that the rate of university graduates surpassed the rate of creation of "social places" for students by two to one.¹⁴¹ He elaborates that between the years of 1950 and 1960 degrees granted by universities grew at roughly 75.1 percent, while the number of social

¹³⁸ Ibid, 29.

¹³⁹ Roberto Escudero and Salvador Martinez Della Rocca, "Mexico: Generation '68," *NACLA Report* 12:5 (Sept-Oct, 1978): 10.

¹⁴⁰ Diaz Ordaz, 4/194.

¹⁴¹ Lorey, *The University System and Economic...*, 144.

places in the middle class grew at 61.5 percent and 41.2 percent in the semi-leisure class.¹⁴² The difference increased during the next decade. From 1960 to 1970 university issued degrees grew 232.1 percent, much greater than the positions available in the middle class, which increased 73.6 percent and 95.7 percent in the semi-leisure upper class.¹⁴³ One can conclude from these percentages that because students were entering the job market in numbers exceeding available positions in the middle and upper class, during the 1960s students experienced a decrease in the possibility of gaining professional employment and accordingly, access to the material and social benefits of the middle class.¹⁴⁴

As previously outlined, México managed to industrialize with outdated machinery produced abroad, meaning that economic development generated jobs for technicians rather than professionals. Heriberto Castillo Martínez, a member of the Comité de Lucha, reminded the president in a letter that development was dependent on the technical labor of México's workers. He wrote, development, "is due to the continued effort of thousands of technicians, thousands of laborers, and millions of workers from the countryside and city and all of them are Mexicans."¹⁴⁵ The importance of technical labor as suggested by Castillo Martínez is illustrated in the rate of demand. Between 1950 and 1980 the demand for professional labor grew 417.8 percent, while the demand for technicians grew 1,055.3 percent.¹⁴⁶ Technician jobs were largely filled by irregularidades. These irregularidad students fell behind in their studies, never managing to take

¹⁴² Ibid, 142-143.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 143-144. Lorey elaborates that those Mexicans who did experience upward mobility, did so not through a qualitative change in training or occupation, but rather through a change in income. Between 1950-1960 those entering the middle class through an increase in income increased by 50 percent, 64.4 percent between 1960-1970 and 40.5 percent between 1970 and 1980. During the same 30 years those advancing socially from a change in occupation increased by less than half of the percentages of those increasing from income.

¹⁴⁴ Overall increases in positions doesn't necessary reflect mobility if one considers population growth.

¹⁴⁵ Heriberto Castillo Martínez, "Contestación al IV informe presidencial," In *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969): 4/196.

¹⁴⁶ Lorey, *The Rise of Professions...*, 33.

final exams or complete a professional thesis. For reasons not entirely understood, during the 1960s the problem of irregularidades increased. Among the student population at UNAM, for example, irregularidades constituted approximately 39.18 percent.¹⁴⁷ These irregularidades constituted a growing number of egresados—students with technical training but no professional degree—leaving the university. Between the 1960 and 1980 egresados grew at an annual average of 13.9 percent, whereas professional degrees granted between 1950-1980 grew at an annual growth rate of 5.6 percent.¹⁴⁸ These statistics illustrate the growing need for egresados to meet the demand for technicians within the Mexican economy.¹⁴⁹

The characteristics of labor greatly impacted class identities. For example, technicians held the responsibility of applying learned techniques and usually graduate from a secondary or preparatory school, or consisted of students who left the university without a degree.¹⁵⁰ Conversely, professional class status was distinguished by holding a licentiate degree of higher and generally held positions responsible for more advanced knowledge that allows for the adaption of systems of production, introducing and producing new technologies, increasing efficiency and output, and managing work environments and industries.¹⁵¹ With the changing nature of the economy, however, students were denied access to economic advancement traditionally provided by professional level training, and consequently the reproduction of class status was hindered. The demand for material and social gains obtained through university education and professional employment was necessary not only to ascend to the middle class but also to reaffirm one's position within that class. However, as a result of México's development

¹⁴⁷ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 218.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁴⁹ Perhaps then, the stagnation in the quality of university education, as epitomized by the influx of irregularidades, is reflective of changes in the demands of the job market. Students find the expense and effort necessary for professional training nonessential for employment, and consequently, demand less strident examinations and course requirements.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32, 34.

¹⁵¹ Professionals are also included in fields such as law, medicine, and engineering.

policy, demand surpassed the number of available positions in the economy. The economy focused on producing positions for technicians, meaning that graduates either faced unemployment at the professional level or were forced to take technician positions that they were highly overqualified for. Additionally, professionals had to compete with an increasing body of egresados qualified for technician labor and who were also more affordable for employers.

The problem facing university graduates is clearly more complex than simply a decrease in professional level jobs. Rather, student activism was mobilized by a class project to secure professional level status. As this chapter illustrates the economy is central for the understanding of student unrest.¹⁵² On the one hand, students condemned economic development for reducing employment options along with the material gains necessary for the formation of class identity. On the other hand, student activism was mobilized to challenge the fact that economic development tended to benefit business elite rather than the interests of all Mexicans. Thus, students were mobilized both politically to create a more democratic society, and also by class concerns.

In an article, “Un retrato colectivo de la clase media,” author Gabriel Careaga illustrates the frustration and discontent felt by the middle class stemming from the failure to obtain the material gains provided by social mobility. Careaga explains that beginning with the presidencies of Elías Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas, projects to create new bureaucracies, banks, and professional employment promised the strengthening of the middle class. Careaga details that

¹⁵² This chapter draws from Barbara Weinstein’s essay “Developing Inequality.” Weinstein explains that since the cultural turn in the 1980s historians have had little success in addressing the role of the “economy” and proliferation of material inequalities. She explains that in an attempt to move beyond the colonial and Eurocentric implications of development and modernization theory, historians have focused on race, gender, and class discourses to understand “hegemonic power” constructs, while failing to address the inequalities that result from these power constructs. Ultimately, Weinstein recommends the need to return to some form of discussion surrounding development and the economy in the production of inequality; Barbara Weinstein, “Developing Inequality” *The American Historical Review*. 113:1 (February 2008):1-18.

Mexicans envisioned middle class individuals as living in large homes with a garden and regular help. The middle class drove new cars and had good careers. They vacationed in places like Europe and Puerto Vallarta and consumed the finest cuisine. However, the benefits promised by Calles and Cárdenas failed to engender these visions. Careaga asserts that the idealized image of the middle class was a false illusion, and that middle class individuals lived in a much different reality. They drove old cars, lived in multifamily units devoid of any intimacy. Middle class homes were often rented and lacking garden space.¹⁵³ This discrepancy between the idealized material gains of the middle class and their ultimate reality generated deep frustration and anxiety. Careaga asserts that middle class individuals desired to be “rich, prominent, and brilliant” but that their true existence was defined by “poverty and frustration.”¹⁵⁴

Ultimately Careaga depicts the middle class as being deeply plagued by an insecurity stemming from the failure to attain an expected prestige gained from material wealth. He explains that this insecurity is particularly troubling among youth, who stress over their ability to secure a prestigious social status. The power of youth to advance the social structure, Careaga asserts, begins in the university with the ability to “obtain a title that will guarantee success.”¹⁵⁵ As the next section illustrates, student’s sought not only to secure his or her own material futures through professional employment, but first through access to professional training. Students were intent on increasing access to education, not only in an effort to fixate their own position with the middle class but also to foster greater democracy in Mexico by expanding the middle class through university training.

¹⁵³ Gabriel Careaga, “Un retrato colectivo de la clase media,” *Revista Mexicana de Ciencia Política*, 17:65 (July-Sept 1971): 96.

¹⁵⁴ Careaga, 94.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 94.

VI Privatization and the “Bottleneck” in Mexico’s University System: A Clamor for Equal Access to Education

The Strike Committee from 1966 affirmed, “The bottleneck is becoming even narrower. Tens of thousands of students have to fall by the wayside because the obstacles placed by the educational policies of the regime make it even more difficult to advance oneself.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, implicated within these demands for access to social ascension, students demanded the democratic right to equal access to education, challenging what they perceived as an aristocratic education system that favored wealthier students. This section, then, examines aristocraticization as a radicalizing force that motivated political activism among students. Documents from the Strike Council, CNED, and other commentators illustrate that students were angered that access and quality of education was determined by income, leaving the wealthy with an unfair advantage.

In a CNED publication from a meeting with student leaders from the National Association of Law Students and the Student Federation of the Socialist Farmers of México, CNED claimed that student discontent was mounting due to the inability to foster a democratic education system.¹⁵⁷ Standing at odds with democratic reform, the “aristocratization”¹⁵⁸ taking place within the university was reflected in the partitioning of students into private and public universities. This separation was in response to the economy’s demand for labor, as schools were adapted to meet the needs for different levels of expertise. For example, the structure of public universities evolved to produce egresados for technical labor, and as a result generally had less rigorous course work. In doing so, public universities developed a negative reputation as having

¹⁵⁶ The Strike Committees of the Schools of Economics, Political, and Social Sciences, “The Need for Educational Reform and an End to Privilege,” in *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations*, ed. Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 325.

¹⁵⁷ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, “Encuentro Nacional de Dirigentes Estudiantiles,” 4/125.

¹⁵⁸ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democratización*, 36.

an inferior education. Consequently, private universities formed to provide more challenging programs to those students who desired advanced training. In this sense private universities produced graduates to fill the limited number of professional positions in the economy, while public universities produced large numbers of egresados for technician work.

The proliferation of private universities initiated a deconcentration of the university system. Documenting a trend towards deconcentration, David Lorey states that in 1929 México had only five universities all of which were public. By 1958 México had 125 universities, 48 of which were private, and by 1987 of the 326 universities, 191 were private.¹⁵⁹ Activists at the time understood the increase in private universities to be related to the need to secure the interests and preservation of the business elite. Rafael Segovia writing in 1966 contends that private universities were founded for the purpose of “attracting the sons of the bourgeoisie and training the personnel whom it needed to manage its affairs.”¹⁶⁰ Students perceived an education from a private university to be, not only more rigorous academically, but also to be free from the taint of political content. Segovia suggests that this understanding was important for the business elite who believed politics “contaminated” employees.¹⁶¹ Thus private education appeared to serve an “aristocratic” population, offering an apolitical and academically challenging program for the upper class that would produce a limited number of professionally trained individuals. Equally discernable in Segovia’s claim is that students were troubled by the fact that private or public attendance generally fractured along lines of income, meaning that students who could afford the cost of private education were able to receive more advanced training, while the less fortunate students remained at public universities, placing them at a disadvantaged position within the job market. This embodied to students an aristocraticization of education in which

¹⁵⁹ Lorey, *The University System and Economic...*, 130.

¹⁶⁰ Segovia, 312.

¹⁶¹ Segovia, 312.

wealthy students were given privileges not only in education but in the job market as well.

Ultimately, students contested these undemocratic implications of aristocraticization.

Opposition against aristocraticization occurred throughout the 1960s. In an article titled “The Communist Party of México: Before the New Situation at the University,” the party asserts that the aristocraticization of education was a primary radicalizing force against Rector Chávez.¹⁶² This opinion is reiterated in various sources. An anonymous author criticizes Chávez for placing “obstacles” in the way of preparatory students seeking admittance to university programs and faculties.¹⁶³ The article asserts, “...[Chávez] put into practice the predetermined plan of the government to crush all vestiges of democracy in the University and to make of it an elitist institution of the most blatant form.”¹⁶⁴ Referencing entrance exams instituted by Chávez, this author argues that the exams were based on knowledge beyond that of preparatory school curriculum and therefore private school students had an advantage in passing the test and gaining admittance.¹⁶⁵ The Strike Committee echoed these arguments against Chávez, denouncing admission exams as an unfair tool to limit access to university education.

Following the resignation of Chávez, the 1966 Strike Committee continued to challenge the aristocraticization of education, condemning what the committee labeled “educational injustice.”¹⁶⁶ Educational injustice was embodied in the disappointing number of school-age students receiving an education. The Committee recorded that in 1960, of 8.5 million school age children only 5.4 million enrolled in primary school, meaning that 37 percent of children

¹⁶² “El Partido Comunista Mexicano ante la nueva situación en la Universidad,” in *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations*, ed. Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 336.

¹⁶³ “The Fall of the Rector: A Student Perspective,” 322-323.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 322.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 323.

¹⁶⁶ “The Need for Educational Reform and an End to Privilege,” 324.

remained unschooled.¹⁶⁷ The problem was exacerbated as students advance educationally. In 1964 only 280,000 students out of 400,000 primary school students enrolled in secondary education. A year later, 87,000 students were registered in preparatory schools throughout México, meaning that only 20 percent of primary school graduates continued their education. The tapering numbers of enrolled students can be attributed at least partially to admission exams and other restrictions issued by universities including UNAM and IPN, which eliminate potential students.¹⁶⁸ Compounding the problem the Strike Committee recognized that there was a deficit in the number public schools, providing few alternatives to private education. Private schools, however, had entrance limitations of their own, most restrictive being the cost of tuition. To attend private school, the committee argues, "...presupposes belonging to a social class with a high income."¹⁶⁹

At the heart of student opposition to aristocraticization was the demand for equal access to education regardless of one's socioeconomic standing. The Strike Committee proclaimed, "Intellectual capacity and motivation are invalidated by material poverty."¹⁷⁰ Financial constraints, according to these students, limited the possibility for intellectual growth cultivated through a university education. The committee continues explaining that the vast majority of youth from the middle and working classes have to be participating in "productive activities" in effort to help support their families.¹⁷¹ By implication students forced to work part-time are often precluded from professional programs, which require full-time study, resulting in a concentration of financially well-off students enrolling in professional training. Compounding this situation the government offered almost no loans to working class students, especially to attend private

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 324.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 324.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 324.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 325.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 324.

universities.¹⁷² For some youth, the added costs of books, materials, laboratory fees, transportation, and room and board made college entirely unaffordable.¹⁷³ The committee adds that the situation was much worse in the countryside, where considering enrolling in secondary school or higher education was a “utopian” idea.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the committee concludes that with increasing aristocraticization of education, “Only the children of the rich can go on to higher education.”¹⁷⁵

Similar critiques were echoed by CNED in their 1968 writings on the need for democratic reform in México’s education system. These students understood that aristocraticization of education stood directly at odds with democratic reform and needed to be addressed.¹⁷⁶ CNED instructed, “It is a false start to limit the number of students for the sake of improving the quality of teaching. An impulse to the qualitative development of education must bring with it a quantitative increase in students, institutions, and teachers. Do not ask so the solution on one side leads to elite universities, and the other to a degradation of academic standards.”¹⁷⁷ Students from CNED insisted on repudiating private universities that catered only to the elite, instructing students to, “Categorically reject elite universities.”¹⁷⁸ For democratic reform CNED elaborated, “Every day all major sectors of the Mexican youth should be within reach of obtaining an education, so as to incorporate the economically weak,” maintaining that education should be within reach of all sectors of México’s youth. In accordance with students writing in 1966,

¹⁷² Ibid, 325.

¹⁷³ Donald Mabry records that most students were from the middling strata of the federal district. In 1965 the average family income per month was 3,440 pesos. This amount is 25 percent higher than the monthly average in the Federal District, and 219 percent over the national average, which was 1,077 pesos per month. Mabry, 216-217.

¹⁷⁴ “The Need for Educational Reform and an End to Privilege,” 324.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 325,

¹⁷⁶ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 36.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 34.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 40.

CNED activism challenged the reality that personal wealth should determine the quality of education a student receives, demanding equal access to education for all.¹⁷⁹

To allow equal opportunity in education, reform efforts needed to be redirected away from capitalist interests. It would be wrong, CNED concluded, to create a reform program replicating models presented by developed countries, insisting, “Other reform plans attempt to create a system of higher education based on models from developed capitalist countries, using propositions, such as ‘any one who can pay’ to establish quotas.”¹⁸⁰ These capitalist countries, which governed access to education on the basis of “anyone who can pay,” preserved trends towards aristocraticization of education. Equally problematic was the forging of alliances with private funding, which CNED understood to limit the individualistic course of study, directing students towards careers needed for the economy rather than personal interest.¹⁸¹ Reform, then, that does not move away from private interests has the consequence of limiting access to education. Students wrote, “restrictions that establish bottlenecks at every educational level block the path of thousands and thousands of young applicants.”¹⁸²

A columnist writing over a month after the massacre in Tlatelolco Square insisted on the importance of continuing to demand an end to the aristocratization of education. Because the continued existence of the movement appeared unlikely, the columnist instructed his readers to assume the responsibility of fighting for equality in education. Reiterating the words of the students, he asserted, “Access to education should be given to all social classes, and not just the

¹⁷⁹ Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, “Al magisterio nacional: al movimiento organizado de México: a la opinión pública,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/104.

¹⁸⁰ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 38.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 38.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 38.

privileged.”¹⁸³ He warned readers that if the cost of education continued to increase, national progress would be hindered.¹⁸⁴ Thus, similar to the student movement, this writer recognizes the centrality of education for the development of Mexico, and for the student’s democratic project.

In response to persistent demands, the administration of Luis Echeverría attempted some degree of reform.¹⁸⁵ In an effort to increase access to schooling, the Ministry of Education created additional undergraduate colleges and preparatory schools independent of UNAM, including the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.¹⁸⁶ UNAM also founded new preparatory colleges focusing on the sciences and humanities.¹⁸⁷ The success of these new colleges in equalizing education is debatable, however, the institutionalization of education reform draws attention to the political importance of the student movement. The response of the Echeverría administration illustrates that student activism was perceived as a political challenge, that needed to be addressed.

Student demands for democratic education was a reoccurring concern across the globe, forcing governments to acknowledge their grievances. For example, in 1963 student activists in Paris challenged the organization of the university system. Students believed that overcrowded schools were contributing to dropout rates, unemployment, and the overall quality of education.¹⁸⁸ In response to student protest the government instituted a two-year degree program. However, in reaction to this proposal, student activism intensified, believing that such a program would decrease the number of working class individuals with access to university education.

¹⁸³ Ernesto Julio Teissier, “Sobre la reforma a la educación: la difícil profesión de hombre,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/377.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4/387.

¹⁸⁵ These reforms were part of the Democratic Opening, *Apertura Democrática*, initiated by Echeverría during his presidency in an attempt to regain public approval following the massacre.

¹⁸⁶ Shapira, 573. Some suggest, including Yoram Shapira and Elaine Carey, that education reforms were instituted in part as a means to diminish the influence of UNAM in the wake of the student movement.

¹⁸⁷ Shapira, 573.

¹⁸⁸ Katsiaficas, 91-92.

Further, students in Paris argued that two-year programs would be based on technical training, and consequently further reduce the humanitarian content of courses, a critique similarly voiced by Mexican students.¹⁸⁹ Thus, a commonality among students both in Paris and Mexico resided in a political critique of economic development and development's influence on education. However, in addition to recognizing the existence of a global movement of youth activists, this chapter illustrates the importance of understanding that within this movement there was likely a diversity of student concerns deeply rooted in local matters.

Without doubt, Mexican students in the 1960's organized to challenge the "bottleneck" in the education system caused by high costs of tuition and entrance exams. As students progressed through school, enrollment numbers constricted, allowing students with greater access to more resources to advance while others fell behind. The very top few students who could afford the tuition of private school received professional training, providing these students with an advantage in the job market, and accordingly a greater chance for social mobility. Middle class students were not simply troubled by the deficit in professional jobs, but also by the thought of losing access to professional status due to increases in tuition beyond their own economic means. Further, students also condemned the reality that fewer individuals would be able to *enter* the middle class without access to university training. Students understood a growing middle class to be symbolic of the democratic society the movement was fighting for. They envisioned a productive role for all Mexicans within the economy, arguing that development was not only an upper class project, but rather through increased access to education more Mexicans could contribute to the development of a strong economy and a democratic society. The Strike Committee in 1966 affirmed that education would only be authentically popular, when "the taking of political power by the working class will emancipate all oppressed classes, among them

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 91-92.

the great majority of students.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, these challenges to the aristocraticization of education reflect the complexity of student radicalization and the intermingling of class concerns and political demands for democratic equality.

¹⁹⁰ “The Need for Educational Reform and an End to Privilege,” 325.

CHAPTER 3 Extending a Hand to the Mexican People: The Radicalizing Influence of Economic Inequality

“The demands of the democratic student movement, from the most simplistic to the most complex, have an interrelation with the situation and demands of the working people.” -CNED¹⁹¹

“The creation of a democratic tradition in Mexico is as important and just as urgent a problem as economic development and the struggle to achieve genuine equality.” –Octavio Paz¹⁹²

As the previous chapter illustrates students’ demand for equal access to education was rooted in a desire for the democratization of México. However, this concern extended beyond the realm of education to include a deep commitment to the standard of living of all Mexicans. In 1958 students took to the streets in solidarity with striking railroad workers, protesting a bleak standard of living and the failure of the PRI to improve economic conditions.¹⁹³ Railroad workers in 1957 organized in opposition against their own union, Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana (STFRM) which they believed had become a puppet organization of the PRI.¹⁹⁴ Workers complained that falling wages were not sufficient to keep up with the increasing cost of living. However, in contract negotiations in 1957 STFRM refused to advocate wage increases, illustrating that the leaders of the union were driven by the economic and political concerns of the PRI rather than the well-being of the workers.¹⁹⁵ Railroad employees protested in the streets and occupied buildings, demanding the democratization of their union. This action generated substantial support from various national unions including oil workers, electricians, telephone operators, as well as students. The determined support of

¹⁹¹ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 35.

¹⁹² Octavio Paz, introduction to *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1971), xvii.

¹⁹³ Robert Francis Alegre, “Contesting the ‘Mexican Miracle’: Railway Men and Women and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico, 1943-1959,” (PhD diss., Rutgers State University of New Jersey, 2007), 161; Also among complaints voiced by railroad workers during the 1958 conflict was a lack of affordable housing. Some workers contended that the poorest had no other option than to construct houses from “discarded” material.

¹⁹⁴ Alegre, 154.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 154-155.

students is reflected in their persistent demand throughout 1968 for the release of political prisoners including Demetrio Vallejo, the leader of the railroad workers movement.¹⁹⁶

Students continued to express support for the working class throughout the 1960s. Writing for their symposium on the need for educational reform CNED proclaimed, “The demands of the democratic student movement, from the most simplistic to the most complex, have an interrelation with the situation and demands of the working people.” CNED articulated an understanding of the “interrelation” between student demands and the current “situation” of México’s working people.¹⁹⁷ Victor Rico Galan, a political prisoner, conveyed a similar understanding. In a letter addressed simply to “students” he instructs them to listen to the people. He cautions against focusing too much attention on the release of political prisoners, observing, “We political prisoners do not suffer more legal abuses nor more deprivations than Mexican peasants suffer under the sway of the agrarian authorities.”¹⁹⁸ Victor Rico Galan continues, “We political prisoners do not suffer more legal abuses nor more deprivation than Mexican workers suffer.”¹⁹⁹ The responsibility of the students according to this activist, was to stand up for the working people especially since students were fortunate to have greater flexibility and freedom to be politically active.²⁰⁰

This chapter reflects the embodiment of Rico Galan’s words in the larger student movement, examining demands for improved standard of living for all Mexican citizens as a primary radicalizing force for student activism during the 1960s. Students deplored the poor

¹⁹⁶ Alegre, 156-157; Demetrio Vallejo Martínez was a “rank-and-file” worker from Oaxaca who became the leader of the movement, and was later elected Secretary General of the railway union. He proposed demands that intended to democratize the structure of the union allowing for increased participation of workers. He also demanded wage increase for workers. However, Demetrio Vallejo Martínez’s radicalism ultimately resulted in his imprisonment.

¹⁹⁷ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 35.

¹⁹⁸ Victor Rico Galan, “Letter From a Political Prisoner to the Students” in *Mexico '68: The Students Speak*, The United States Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners, 22.

¹⁹⁹ Rico Galan, 22.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 22.

standard of living experienced by the majority of Mexicans, attributing this reality to low wages, the failure of income distribution, poor taxation practices, and the intrusion of foreign monopolies in México's economy. To gain an understanding of the conditions lived by the majority of México, this chapter draws largely from Pablo Gonzales Casanova's book, *Democracy in México*. Casanova calls for income distribution and taxation reform to mediate conditions and improve México's standard of living. CNED publications also illustrate student frustration with the detrimental affects of foreign intervention in the economy. Additionally, sources from left leaning political organizations illustrate discontent with the injustice of economic inequality. Together these sources support the centrality of demands for improved economic welfare of all Mexicans as a guiding force of student activism.

I Assessing the Standard of Living

In his book, *Democracy in México* published in 1970, Pablo Gonzales Casanova examined years of census information leading him to the conclusion that México's marginal population increased or remained relatively the same over the last fifty years.²⁰¹ He measures marginality in terms of one's standard of living, and thus the degree of access to food, clothing, education, and overall health. Differences in standard of living he contends are largely determined by a region's characteristics, such as urban or rural, and the measure of industrialization. He asserts that regions where two-thirds of individuals live contain less than one quarter of México's industry.²⁰² Based on census information from 1960, Gonzales Casanova records that in México's urban areas 76 percent of the population was literate, whereas 48 percent was literate in rural regions. In terms of diet, according to the same 1960 census 25,630,000 Mexicans had access to at least one or more of meat, fish, milk, and eggs, for those

²⁰¹ He refers to impoverished and unrepresented rural and urban populations as marginal; Casanova, 75.

²⁰² Casanova, 107.

who were over one year of age. A less fortunate 1,840,000 individuals had access to none.²⁰³

Gonzales Casanova concludes that 87 percent of the urban population had access to these foods, while 13 percent did not. In rural regions, though, 51 percent did not have access to any of these foods.²⁰⁴ The regional differences demonstrated here, illustrate a political critique of Mexico's economic development. Gonzales Casanova challenges the implications of the accumulation of industry in particular areas and its concomitant implication for access to resources, suggesting that Mexico's standard of living could improve if policy allowed for a greater distribution of resources.

Gonzales Casanova continued his statistical analysis of México's standard of living by examining school enrollment. He documents an increasing trend in the percentage of unschooled children until the 1960 census when numbers actually decreased. In 1930, 48.7 percent of the school age population between the ages of six and fourteen were unschooled. This number increased to 54.7 percent in 1940. From then there was a notable decline. In 1950 the percentage had dropped 49.5 percent and in 1960 numbers fell to 36.6 percent.²⁰⁵ According to these statistics the quality of one's standard of living was substantially lower in rural regions as opposed to urban environments. Gonzales Casanova attributes this discrepancy to poor economic policy. Rather than accrediting differences in diet, education, and clothing to cultural preferences, he condemns the government's distribution of national resources for the existence of inequality.

To further elucidate the economic suffering stemming from political policy, Gonzales Casanova includes some brief comments on the troubling plight of México's farmers. Referencing statistics put forward by an economic investigation, he explains that as of 1962 over

²⁰³ Casanova, 73.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 73.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 75.

2.5 million farmers struggled with inadequate access to land. Over half of a million had plots that were less than a half-hectare, leaving the rest of the farmers with land that was not suitable for planting, or worse, no land at all.²⁰⁶ In a publication put forward by the National Union of Education Workers, educators also commented on the situation of farmers. They explained that land reform was a step towards improving social justice and had originally elevated the conditions for farmers. The publication asserted the need for land reform, which they argued, “...established new forms of ownership and land tenure, and which liquidated the exploitation and the servitude of the large masses of peasants...”²⁰⁷ The National Union of Education Workers was likely referring to the land reform promoted by President Cárdenas, the first presidency to seriously enact and prioritize land distribution in an effort to redistribute wealth and improved the social and economic status of many peasants.²⁰⁸

However, following Cárdenas’ presidency, land distribution was reprioritized when Miguel Alemán took office, in effect worsening the condition of peasants and farmers. Judith Hellman explains that President Miguel Alemán revised agrarian law under Article 27, proposing a very different approach to land reform. He reduced the amount of land available to distribute by increasing the legal size of estates.²⁰⁹ Reflected in this revision and in other reforms since the 1940s, government agricultural policy has tended to favor commercial production that benefited the large landed estates. For example, the bulk of government spending, including spending on agricultural research, has been directed towards large-scale production.²¹⁰ Hellman asserts that small farmers or communal farmers have little access to credit or other technical advances, and

²⁰⁶ Casanova, 115

²⁰⁷ Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educacion, 4/103.

²⁰⁸ Prior to Cárdenas, presidential attempts at land reform were weak. Hellman explains that most of the highly productive estates were not redistributed, and that the land that was dispersed was often arid, not irrigated, or far from access to roads and markets. Hellman, 85.

²⁰⁹ Hellman, 93.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 93-94.

ultimately struggle to grow enough food to feed their families or to sell at urban markets. With insufficient land and government subsidies small farmers were placed in a dependent, and subordinate position challenging earlier revolutionary aims of agricultural reform as a means for democratization. This attention given to agricultural policy and the conditions affecting Mexico's farmers, illustrate the extent of the movement's political awareness. Students envisioned a democratic government that served the needs of the Mexican people by supporting self-sufficiency among small farmers and localized markets. Thus, for democracy to flourish in Mexico, a shift in government policy away from the prioritization of business interests and commercial production was understood as essential.

Contained within their commitment to the preservation of democracy, students looked beyond their immediate environment to demand change for rural and urban populations alike. The standard of living among Mexico's farmers and peasant population was truly alarming for Gonzales Casanova. After further analysis he concludes in his summation that a juxtaposition of the highest and lowest standards of living expose an illiteracy rate more than twice as high for the poor, a student-teacher ratio that is four times higher for the poor, and a death rate that was more than twice as high.²¹¹ Clearly, the research put forward in Gonzales Casanova's book illustrates that there was a substantial difference in the standard of living between the rich and the poor, a difference that was exacerbated for rural populations. While statistical information can be fraught with problems and generate more questions than it attempts to answer, what is important here is the concern exhibited by Gonzales Casanova. A devoted participant of the student youth movement, Gonzales Casanova's research suggests that within the movement supporters were cognizant of the economy's influence on the quality of life of all sectors of Mexico's society. Students organized to challenge the inequality epitomized in the differences in

²¹¹ Casanova, 108.

the standard of living within Mexico, emphasizing the need for a more equitable distribution of resources to encourage the democratization of society.

II Real Wages and Unequal Distribution of Wealth

Gonzales Casanova, among others, understood low wages and meager incomes as one of the root causes of México's poor standard of living. Since 1939 real wages had been in decline in México.²¹² Judith Hellman explains that despite the slow rise in wages beginning in 1940, increased wages were insufficient to match the rapidly increasing cost of living.²¹³ Thus, while workers were receiving greater wages, in reality, their paychecks were not enough to cover the rising cost of food and housing, illustrating that real wages were in fact in decline. Consequently, by 1950 the earnings of workers had declined by nearly forty percent, as they were unable to experience an actual increase in income and ultimately a greater standard of living. Real wages continued to fall until 1952, only being restored to their pre-1939 level in 1957.

One explanation for the continual depression of wages is a surplus in labor. Chapter 2 illustrates how student dissatisfaction stemmed in part from the fact that there was an absence of professional level jobs to meet the demands of an increasingly large body of graduates. The working class population experienced a similar deficit in new jobs. One statistic stated that each year roughly 750,000 to 800,000 new workers were seeking employment; while on average only 300,000 new jobs were created annually.²¹⁴ Traditionally, when there is a large supply of surplus labor, the unemployed are forced to settle for lower salaries, in effect depressing wages. Poor salaries in turn fail to give working class Mexicans the income necessary to increase their standard of living. Referenced in his book, Gonzales Casanova cites a study conducted by experts from the Bank of México in 1963, which stated "twenty-nine percent of all families had

²¹² Alegre, 161; Hellman 61.

²¹³ Hellman, 61.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 70.

incomes lower than 400 pesos per month.” In rural areas Gonzales Casanova notes that the situation was much more severe; forty-one percent of families had incomes below 400 pesos per month.²¹⁵ Gonzales Casanova then juxtaposed these monthly incomes in relation to México’s wealthier population. He concluded that the income variance allowed for drastic differences in standard of living, claiming that quality cannot be measured between relatively high standards of living and extremely high standards of living but rather should be measured on a scale between “poverty to wealth, and misery to splendid living.”²¹⁶ A professor from the philosophy department similarly denounces inequity in Mexico, claiming that the nation was defined by, “social inequalities with scandalous extremes of wealth and poverty.”²¹⁷ The student movement, accordingly, organized in response to the inequalities generated by the failure of income distribution. Without distribution, social stratification in Mexico became more polarized, slowly eroding the size of the middle class. This was highly problematic to the students’ political project, which recognized a large middle class as central for the strengthening of democracy.

Overwhelmingly supporters of the movement convey a similar critique of income variance in México, denouncing an unjust distribution of wealth as the cause of the poor standard of living that predominated in México. One student took note of the unjust distribution of wealth when she stated that between the years of 1940-1956, “Workers were experiencing their relative share of the national income drop steadily.”²¹⁸ A document published by NACLA supports the assertion that México’s workers were losing out on national economic gains, proclaiming that

²¹⁵ Gonzalez, 106-107.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 108; A detailed study conducted during the 1960s by economist Clark W. Reynolds supports Gonzales Casanova’s discussion of income distribution. Reynold’s examination of the structure and development of the Mexican economy from 1900-1965 reveals that inequality between the rich and poor continued to increase over time. He attributes income variance in part to the increasing supply of unskilled labor which served to depress wages. Clark W. Reynolds, *The Mexican Economy: Twentieth-Century Structure and Growth* (London: Yale University Press, 1970), 80-81.

²¹⁷ Poniatowska, 15.

²¹⁸ Rico Galan, 11.

while the poor were receiving less and less, wealthier Mexicans were receiving more. The document claimed, “In the twenty years between 1950 and 1970 the poorest 40 percent of the Mexican population saw their share of the national wealth drop from 14 to 11 percent, while the richest 10 percent upped their share to over half.”²¹⁹ Joining in this condemnation, the Socialist Party, in a manifesto published in 1968, called for an improved policy which would distribute national income and replace current policy which it saw as being based on the “unjust distribution of wealth.”²²⁰

CNED offered the same critical evaluation of income distribution in México, contending that the low standard of living was the “direct result” of an unfair distribution of wealth. CNED provided statistical analysis from the Secretary of Industry and Commerce to support their claim, asserting that in 1964 a small minority of economically active individuals, 33,000 people held 54.9 percent of the national income. Further, 84.6 percent of economically active individuals earned a monthly income between 0-1,500 pesos, which translated to 23.4 percent of the national income.²²¹ CNED and other students provided detailed statistical analysis in effort to elucidate what they recognized as an unfair distribution of income. The inability of the national economy to fairly disperse the nation’s wealth resorted in a deplorable economic inequality in which a

²¹⁹ Escudero, 5.

²²⁰ Partido Popular Socialista, “Manifiesto: contra la provocación antinacional, unidad del pueblo,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/101; Communist Youth in Mexico also criticized the inequality between the “exploited” and the “exploiters.” These young communists believed that the failure of the Mexican revolution resulted in the intensifying of class antagonisms, writing that in Mexico, “the majority are the exploited, while the great exploiters are an insignificant minority.” Juventud Comunista de Mexico, “Comisión Ejecutiva del Comité central,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/82.

²²¹ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 16; “The low standard of living of Mexican Workers is the direct consequence of the unfair distribution of wealth. The statistics of the Secretary of Industry and Commerce reveal that of the 10, 900 people considered in the economically active population in 1964, a small minority of 33,000 people earn from 10,000- 5,000 pesos. 84.6% of economically active population earned a monthly income from 0 to 1,500 pesos, that is 23.4% of the national income, and only 14.6% earned a monthly income from 1,500 to 5,000 pesos.”

small fraction of the elite managed to accrue practically unlimited profits.²²² This accumulation of wealth came largely at the expense of the working class, who failed to generate sufficient income to afford the increasing costs of food and housing. The existence of such inequality epitomized the inadequacies of current government. Conservative forces in the government adhered to the idea that that the nation's capital gains would percolate down through all sectors of Mexican society, trusting a "trickle down" theory of economics.²²³ However, students recognized that this was a falsity, considering that economic gains generally reach the working class through high wages.

Thus as the students explicate, in the absence of high wages current economic policy did not work, and consequently the distribution of wealth was inhibited and México suffered severe income inequality. Fair wages and income distribution, democratic promises embodied in the Mexican Revolution, failed to materialize engendering a low standard of living. This failure radicalized students to demand improved economic conditions. Students understood that a change to economic policy was necessary in order to foster a democratic society that benefited the Mexican people rather than continually rewarding the elite.

III Foreign Interference, Government Spending, and Tax Reform

Stated within their publication on the need for educational reform, CNED associates the influence of foreign business interests with economic inequality in México, communicating, "The unjust distribution of wealth reflects the characteristics of our dependent economic development and the distortion caused by the interference of international monopolies. This is

²²² National percentages recorded by Judith Hellman support the figures presented by students. She records that "the income of the richest 5 percent of all Mexicans was 22 times that of the poorest 10 percent." Hellman explains that this gap continued to grow, so much so, that by 1980 the income of the wealthiest Mexicans was fifty times greater than that of the poorest sectors. Hellman, 63.

²²³ Hellman, 59. The movement's analysis of income distribution reflects a political critique of "trickle down" economics. Judith Hellman explains that México largely adhered to a "trickle down" theory of economics.

the effect of an unpopular policy, oriented towards shifting the main burden of development onto the backs of the workers.”²²⁴ CNED understands México’s economy as being in a state of crisis because of its dependence on foreign business. This dependence impacts México’s workers in terms of the burden of labor and unjust distribution of wealth. In agreement with CNED, documents from the late 1960s are abounding with accusations against the influence of foreign companies. CNED, Gonzales Casanova, and various other voices attribute the prioritization of business interests, both domestic and foreign, as the leading cause of low wages and consequently a low standard of living in México.

The supremacy of business interests is a product of México’s adherence to capitalism as a means for economic development. Given the uneven and unequal development in the global capitalist economic system, México became dependent on foreign corporations. A NACLA report notes that the expanse of México’s economic growth occurred “within a strict framework of U.S. imperialism.”²²⁵ The report elaborates that in order to stimulate the economy, the state borrowed heavily from foreign banks, which resulted in multinational companies gaining substantial influence within the Mexican economy.²²⁶ CNED recognizes the correlation between development, foreign investment, and the accumulation of debt, explaining that the Mexican government relied on foreign credit for new capital as a means to stimulate growth.²²⁷ However, foreign credit generated lasting ramifications, most significantly México’s increasing debt.²²⁸ CNED discloses that in 1967 México’s deficit was nearly 515 million dollars,²²⁹ and considering that foreign investment had been increasing in recent years, CNED reasoned that México’s debt

²²⁴ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 16-17.

²²⁵ Escudero, 10.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

²²⁷ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 12.

²²⁸ Hellman explains that Mexico borrowed capital from international institutions such as the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. Her statistics however, are much higher. She states that by the 1960s the nation’s foreign debt had reached 1.8 billion and continued to rise substantially through the 1970s. Hellman, 62.

²²⁹ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 12.

would only continue to swell.²³⁰ Mobilization against foreign influence, particularly the amassing of debt, illustrates the movement's political critique. Students condemned the nation's reliance on foreign capital, believing that development should stem from Mexico's own resources and labor. Further, the use of foreign loans benefited only a minority of business elite. Thus, students challenged the current economic development for increasing inequality and consequently failing to strengthen Mexican society.

Problematic to both CNED and NACLA reporters was the influential position business interests gained from México's reliance on foreign credit. CNED students contended that international monopolies gained control over important sectors of the economy, in effect distorting social priorities away from the needs of the people to benefit business.²³¹ In agreement, Gonzalez Casanova labels the Mexican state a "direct agent of big business."²³² When government is converted to serve the interests of the business elite, contention emerges over the distribution of government revenues. As previously mentioned the government assumed foreign loans to stimulate economic growth largely by building industry. In order to maximize growth, investments in industrial infrastructure are required. Since the 1940s the Mexican Government largely directed funds towards roads, dams, irrigation, hydraulic works, electrification, and communication systems.²³³ The government's building of infrastructure necessary for industrialization created conditions ideal for private companies to easily construct facilities and factories. However, the spending of public revenues on infrastructure for the benefit of private businesses, by implication, illustrated the government's deprioritization of social spending.

Students and other activists questioned the government's priorities and the allocation of

²³⁰ Ibid, 11.

²³¹ Ibid, 11.

²³² Casanova, 9.

²³³ Hellman, 71. Lorey, *The University System and Economic...*, 4;

public funds. In the face of substantial foreign loans assumed by the Mexican government, a NACLA report comments on the absence of social spending, stating, “Despite the massive influx of foreign loans by the end of the 1960s the Mexican government spent a yearly average of 1.4 percent of GNP on education.”²³⁴ The report further criticizes the fact that only 19 percent of México’s workers were receiving social security benefits.²³⁵ Statistics recorded by Hellman substantiate NACLA’s claim. She reveals that during peak investments in infrastructure during the 1940s and 1950s, less than 15 percent of total government investments were contributed to social welfare.²³⁶ Continuing this trend, in 1975 the state spent only 8.4 percent on education, and social security covered only one-quarter to one-third of workers. By 1980 state investments in health and welfare had dropped to 13 percent.²³⁷ Hellman and NACLA reporters capture the reality that with government spending on industrial infrastructure so high, there was little money remaining for social programs. Rather than spending for the people, funds were directed towards industrialization and the interests of business elite. Ultimately, the priorities of the government failed to reflect a commitment to democracy. Students believed that the government had a responsibility to alleviate conditions of inequality exacerbated by failures in income distribution. Aided by government spending, a greater number of individuals would have access to the tools necessary to become a productive force in Mexico’s economic development. Thus, by assisting only a small minority of elite, the government and, consequently, development failed to serve all of Mexican society.

Students not only ridiculed foreign influences for dominating state priorities but also denounced the practice of deinvestment. Deinvestment—a term for the removal of profits made

²³⁴ Escudero, 10.

²³⁵ Ibid, 10.

²³⁶ Hellman, 72.

²³⁷ Ibid, 72.

in México by foreign companies—compounded the problem of an absence of funds for social spending. Students criticized the government for spending on industrialization to attract foreign investments, when these international companies then extracted profits from México and returned them to the company's country of origin. In effort to mediate against this, CNED argues against the involvement of foreign companies, attacking deinvestment practices. CNED states that between 1940 and 1960 the average annual sum of deinvested capital was \$66 million dollars.²³⁸ This reduces the accumulation of capital in México and consequently diminishes funds available for healthcare, education, and other social services.

Gonzales Casanova also helps to expound deinvestment numbers. He records that between 1947 and 1952 foreign companies invested \$6.4 million dollars and yet removed \$111.7 million from México.²³⁹ Between 1953-1958, \$99.8 million was invested, and \$116.6 million was deinvested. He recorded similar numbers for the following years. Between 1959 and 1964 \$114.1 million was invested and \$164.4 million was deinvested.²⁴⁰ Gonzales Casanova points out that the removal of profits is detrimental to the Mexican economy not only because it results in the decapitalization of industry but also because it further exacerbates inequality within the markets. The cost of exportable goods from both the U.S. and México was a disadvantage to Mexicans, considering that U.S. goods imported in México were becoming more expensive while Mexican exports were becoming cheaper.²⁴¹ Additionally, a central component of trickle down economics entails the reinvestment of profits back into the local economy in order to redistribute wealth, particularly in the form of increased wages. Thus, the removal of capital inhibited the distribution of profits and depressed wages. This left Mexicans unable to afford the

²³⁸ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 12.

²³⁹ Casanova, 141.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 141.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 142.

increasing cost of goods and with diminished benefits gained from social spending.

Similarly, in a letter to President Diaz Ordaz, Heriberto Castillo Martinez from the strike committee critiques the implications of foreign interference on the Mexican people. He questions why economic interests are centered on foreign concerns at the expense of México, asking if the president considers that foreign influences, “tend first to their economic interests, to the interests of their countries of origin, before the interests of our people...”²⁴² Heriberto Castillo Martinez continues explaining that the labor of the Mexican people was the source of oil, road, and railway production and, thus, the people have a right to the riches they generate without foreign interference.²⁴³ Clearly, then, unrest among students centered on the primacy of business interests above the welfare of the Mexican people. Activists such as Heriberto Castillo Martinez from the strike committee and Gonzales Casanova, as well as, other student organizations demanded equal access to economic gains not only for social spending but also as just compensation for labor.

To allow greater social spending, students maintained that the government not only needed to be less dependent on foreign interference but also to initiate tax reform. CNED maintained that in order for the state to have sufficient funds, tax reform was essential.²⁴⁴ At the current time México had a regressive system of income taxation, meaning that rates of taxation were lower as the amount being taxed increased, resulting in the income of the wealthy being taxed less than the poor’s income. The Socialist Party in 1968 condemns the unfair burden of Mexico’s tax system, stating that if profits must go to the business “tycoons” then as a class they should be responsible for the burden of social spending rather than the workers. The party also argued that tax reform was necessary to allow for greater income for the working class,

²⁴² Castillo Martinez, 4/197.

²⁴³ Ibid, 4/197.

²⁴⁴ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 12.

suggesting that the government needed to "...seriously and steadily increase the incomes of the working population and free them from many tax burdens."²⁴⁵ Socialist Party members, in conjunction with student activists, were defending the interest of the people by demanding a progressive form of taxation. Injustice rested in the reality that business interests consumed government revenues to the detriment of social spending, and also in the fact that those most in need of government programs were responsible for contributing funds through a tax system that favored the wealthy.

Gonzales Casanova also finds fault in México's tax system, berating its regressive nature. He alleges, "The system is unjust and favors income derived from capital property rather than derived from work."²⁴⁶ Not only then does a regressive tax system fail to foster much revenue, but the system also unfairly targets the income of workers rather than those individuals with substantial "capital property." By implication a system which taxes wage labor places the burden of generating government revenue for social spending on the backs of the working class. To remedy this situation Gonzales Casanova proposed a progressive tax system in effort to aid the sectors of society less capable of paying. By shifting the tax burden, and using income to determine the amount taxed, this proposed system would leave more capital in the hands of the lower classes, and work towards reducing income inequality. This reduction would allow for the emergence of the society envisioned by Gonzales Casanova in which there was an expanding middle class that increasingly contributed to economic development. The capital gains from the contribution of Mexico's workers, then, must be redistributed to allow for the middle class to grow. Thus, Gonzales Casanova, along with other students, conceives of an intricate connection between advances in development and the strengthening of democracy. He hoped for an

²⁴⁵ Partido Popular Socialista, 4/101.

²⁴⁶ Casanova, 140.

economically advanced Mexico that was balanced with income distribution and equality.

CNED students agreed with Gonzales Casanova, elaborating that a progressive income tax would generate greater revenue.²⁴⁷ Additionally, students called for greater taxation on the profits gained by large domestic and foreign companies and millionaires.²⁴⁸ This demand developed in response to the low rate of taxation on industrialists' income, a practice employed by México as a means to attract private investment.²⁴⁹ Reform measures laid out by CNED also urged that property owners and "capitalists" who earned a yearly income over half a million pesos should be required to pay supplemental surcharges. Ultimately, these measures endeavored to generate increased government revenues for social spending in an attempt to reduce economic inequality.²⁵⁰

Inequality generated from failures in income distribution, Mexico's system of taxation, and diminished social spending, motivated students to demand an economic policy that benefited the working class and encouraged the redistribution of profits toward wages and social spending,

²⁴⁷ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 32.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁴⁹ Hellman, 61.

²⁵⁰ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 33; In 1968, when a vast population of Mexicans suffered from the absence of social spending, México City's preparation for the hosting of the Olympic games created a context for student outrage. The games exposed the acutely distorted priorities of the Mexican government. In an effort to prepare for the games the government contributed millions of pesos for sports arenas, publicity, and housing for athletes, press, and tourists. Critics contend that the government was set on crafting an image of México as an advanced and well-developed country. However, for students such spending was an atrocity when many Mexicans' standard of living was so depressed due to the failure of the government to contribute funds for affordable housing, medical services, and education.²⁵⁰ Discernible then, was yet another illustration of the government dismissing the needs of the Mexican people in favor of business interests. Spending on the Olympics compounded an already severe deficit of federal funds and failed to elevate the condition of all sectors of Mexican society.

Additionally, a majority of the history of the Student Youth Movement in Mexico, centers the movement in relation to the Olympic games. Many argue that the government responding so brutally in October 1968, just days before the games were to start, because of the international attention directed at Mexico. Fearful over the image of disgruntled youth on the strength and development of Mexico, the government quickly put an end to the movement. The Mexican government, as well as, foreign voices including the U.S. feared that students were intent on interrupting the Olympic games. However, overwhelming students asserted that their aim was not to preclude the Olympics from taking place, they simply wanted to challenge the government expenditures. On October 3, 1968 the National Strike Committee in a letter to Bertrand Russell, affirmed that their intent was not to interfere with the games; "The Mexican Student Movement of 1968: An Olympic Perspective," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 6 (May 2009): 825-826.

rather than an economic system centered on the interests of both domestic and foreign business elites. As demonstrated in the demand for equal access to education, students envisioned a growing and productive middle class as the foundation of a democratic society. In effort to achieve this political aim, students promoted economic development but also demanded that productivity be partnered with the redistribution of capital to improve conditions for the lower classes and ultimately expand the size of the middle class. This concern for the economic improvement of the poorer sectors of the Mexican population reiterates the political content of student activism. Students were motivated to challenge economic policy and inequality because these factors contradicted the democratic ideal envisioned by the movement.

CHAPTER 4 A Population without Representation: Challenging México's Single-Party System

“The great historical movements in our country have been formed through the participation of all the people and not by lawless pressure groups or factions.”²⁵¹

“The system of balance of powers does not work. There is a strong disequilibrium, and it favors the executive. Thus one cannot help but wonder what the function of the legislative power is. It seems that the legislative power has a symbolic function.” –Gonzales Casanova²⁵²

The growing concern for the Mexican people among students represents participation in a larger international political project. During the post-World War II period there was an increasing commitment to improving the conditions of the lower classes. Within this movement there was a particular emphasis on promoting working class participation within the political sphere as a means for advancing change.²⁵³ Mexican students exhibited a similar attention to increasing political participation. Students understood that in order for the government to be attentive to the needs of the people, México's masses necessitated their own political representation. Without such representation and democratic organizations to promote the interests of the people, business would continue to dominate policy.

This chapter examines political reform and demands for popular representation as a radicalizing force of the student movement. Sources illustrate discontent over the absence of a political party to represent the needs of the Mexican people. Students cite failures of unionization, minimal oppositional parties, and a concentration of power, as key factors inhibiting the formation of a popular organization and a government that is responsive to the needs of the people rather than big business. Thus, in order for the materialization of the society students envisioned, greater representation for the Mexican people was essential.

²⁵¹ *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968; documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/196.

²⁵² Casanova, 20.

²⁵³ Grandin, 6.

I Participatory Democracy within the Student Movement

In an expression of the democratic ideals students desired for Mexico, the structure of the student movement itself reflected a deep concern for equality and representation. The National Strike Committee (CNH) consisted of 250 representatives from all participating schools, roughly 128 private and public universities and secondary schools. These representatives constituted the formal structure of CNH and were responsible for larger organizational strategies, while numerous localized representative bodies made up of thousands of student participants managed daily activities.²⁵⁴ As a general rule the movement had no specific leaders. Rather, on a weekly basis CNH reassembled the movement's governing committee.²⁵⁵ Judith Hellman suggests that this was important in order to limit the influence of government control. She explains that in the absence of definitive leaders the government could not easily attack, co-opt, or imprison key individuals in order to derail the movement.²⁵⁶ Additionally, rotating positions of responsibility encouraged a distribution of power, preventing any one individual from gaining too much influence while also reinforcing the democratic nature of the movement.²⁵⁷ The creation of smaller representative bodies to focus on the local level also reflects the importance of grassroots democracy to student activists.

Autonomous student brigades organized daily activities and outreach on a more localized level. Thousands of student participants formed brigades for the purpose of popularizing their demands and building a stronger movement. These students passed out leaflets, hung up posters, collected donations, organized public forums, and recruited supporters from México's working

²⁵⁴ Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier, "Defining the Space of Mexico '68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and 'Women' in the streets," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83:4 (2003), 638.

²⁵⁵ Hellman, 175.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 176.

²⁵⁷ Cohen, 639; Hellman, 176; Vargas Valdez, 738.

class.²⁵⁸ A report reproduced by the Strike Committee of the Philosophy department, asserted that the brigades successfully organized both high school and university students, stating, “...students have become political forces capable of going into action in any moment.”²⁵⁹ The report further states that the continual effort of the brigades was necessary for generating support from the people, contending that the success of the movement rested on the participation of the working masses.²⁶⁰ In this sense student brigades epitomized the democratic nature of the youth movement. The movement encouraged direct democracy by promoting the active participation of all student activists and working class individuals alike. Students also initiated a strong program of outreach to the Mexican people in effort to allow for participatory democracy among all sectors of society. Ultimately, students attempted to replicate their imagined society within the structure of CNH itself, emphasizing the importance of democratic organization, representation, and a deconcentration of power. Student activism was driven by the desire to inspire these values that defined CNH within Mexico to create a strong, democratic government.

II Unorganized Workers and the Inadequacies of Unionization

Gonzales Casanova suggests that the absence of large and inclusive unions precluded the existence of a democratic working class movement, and accounts for the lack of representative organization for the majority of the Mexican population.²⁶¹ In agreement with Gonzales Casanova many students attributed the lack of political representation of the working classes in part to government control of labor unions. CTM, the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (The Confederation of Mexican Workers) constituted a primary example of government infiltration in labor unions. In March of 1938 CTM became intricately linked to the government

²⁵⁸ Soldatenk, 288.

²⁵⁹ “Strike Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy...,” 6.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 12.

²⁶¹ Casanova, 140.

with President Cárdenas' transformation of the National Revolutionary Party into the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM). Cárdenas reformulated the structure of PRM to consist of four distinct sectors, the army, the popular sector,²⁶² a National Peasant Confederation, CNC, and also CTM.²⁶³ Cárdenas created these sectors in an attempt to limit divisions and also expand representation by institutionalizing participation within the party.²⁶⁴ As a result CTM became closely affiliated with PRM, subordinating the main workers' organizations to the government interests. According to Gonzales Casanova, "two-thirds of unionized workers belonged to CTM." Worse still, argues Gonzales Casanova, only 10.5 percent of México's working population was unionized.²⁶⁵ Thus, the majority of those workers who did belong to a union were represented by an organization that was engrained within the realm of government influence. One example of this was the railroad workers strike in 1958 when union leaders yielded to the demands of the government at the expense of the needs of the workers.

Government influence on unions was also reflected in the relationship between strikes and economic conditions. Gonzales Casanova argues, "In most countries where there are powerful trade unions and worker's unions, we find a clear correlation between strike movements and economic cycle."²⁶⁶ However, in México he finds no such correlation due to the control of unions by the government.²⁶⁷ Union leaders under the guise of government or business elite are encouraged to act in accordance with the needs of business rather than workers. Thus,

²⁶² The popular sector, discussed below, consisted of the business elite and the professional class.

²⁶³ The military only remained one of the sectors until about 1940, when the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, removed its role in the party. Prior to this change the president traditionally gained influence and honor from military experience. However, after this change presidential candidates came from the upper strata of the society.

²⁶⁴ CNC illustrates an attempt to bring organized rural labor under the influence and control of the federal government. Brain R. Hammet suggests that this was in an effort to limit the influence of Lombardo Toledano, a Marxist intent on refashioning the Mexican Revolution after the Soviet model. Brain R. Hammet, *A Concise History of Mexico*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 236.

²⁶⁵ Casanova, 121.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 15.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 15.

despite the constitutional right to organize and strike guaranteed by Article 123, barriers existed. These barriers included the government control of unions, intended to inhibit the ability of unions to exercise their most potent weapon – the right to strike, shut production down, and cut into the owners’ profits.²⁶⁸ Without these weapons, the political autonomy of workers was largely diminished. Traditionally unions provided workers with the opportunity to critique conditions and demand change. However, the influence of the government prevented this from actually transpiring. Therefore, students asserted the right of political autonomy for Mexican workers as a necessary component for the democratic society they envisioned.

According to one student “underworld gangs” also served as a tool to inhibit the organizational capabilities of unions. This student explains, “These gangs used bayonets to maintain their power.”²⁶⁹ The role of these “gangsters” was to intimidate workers and peasants to vote for candidates endorsed by the official party, guaranteeing that positions of leadership would be held by individuals sympathetic to party concerns. This student maintains that these coercive tactics created a “rupture” between workers and the PRI as workers became alienated from the government as their needs went unmet. Additionally, coercive infiltration led to a “lowering of the masses’ standard of living.”²⁷⁰ In the absence of an organizational body to defend the rights of workers, business managers felt little pressure to provide wage increases or health benefits which, in turn, lowered the standard of living of México’s workers.

Other students also commented on the lack of representation for workers in industrial or workplace decisions. Government influence on unions, CNED explained, resulted in the diminishing capability of labor organizations to protect the needs of their workers. CNED

²⁶⁸ Article 123 of the constitution was intended to improve labor conditions in Mexico. The article established an eight-hour workday and also set limits for child and female labor. The right to organize and strike were other key components of Article 123. Hamnet, 235.

²⁶⁹ “Strike Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy...,” 11.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 11.

contended that government control "...has weakened the role of united front organizations to defend the interests of it's members."²⁷¹ Once weakened, unions fail to be a viable force to keep business interests in check and ensure the interests of workers.²⁷² In an essay published in 1966, an anonymous student commenting on the lack of educational autonomy implies that the "suffocating" government control of unions, popular organizations, and universities helped to secure a "bourgeoisie democracy."²⁷³ Ultimately then, government control over labor unions rendered unions ineffective, allowing business interests to be prioritized above workers' needs. By implication, without the ability to organize and demand representation, the rights of workers went unprotected, thereby exacerbating economic inequality. This inequality and the diminished access to political autonomy traditionally offered by unions, challenged the student's ideal of a participatory democracy.

III Concentration of Political Power: The Influence of the Executive Branch and the Bourgeoisie

In addition to the inadequacies of unionization, the absence of a political party for the people also excluded the needs of the working class from being represented in government decisions. Gonzales Casanova asserts, "There are no mass parties."²⁷⁴ He continued, "Parties are not organized, subsidized, or controlled by citizens. The power groups organize and control parties."²⁷⁵ The "power groups" to which Gonzales Casanova refers are undoubtedly the business interests which dominated the popular sector of the PRI. Rather than representing the "popular" classes as the title suggests, this sector represents the interests of the middle class but more

²⁷¹ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 18.

²⁷² *Ibid*, 18.

²⁷³ "The Fall of the Rector: A Student Perspective," 321.

²⁷⁴ Casanova, 123.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 123.

predominantly the elite, including professionals, landowners, industrialists, and businessmen.²⁷⁶

Similar to the institutionalization of labor within the official party, this sector also integrated business associations into the party. The popular faction became the most influential faction of the official party, largely because of the sector's economic advantage. Benefiting from higher education and increased incomes, this class was more easily able to lobby the government for its own special interests. Additionally, the government could not ignore the interests of such an economically valuable industrialist and business class, considering that the capital that this class owned was integral for the country's industrial development.

Students and their supporters repeatedly challenged the political power of the bourgeoisie. The CNH commented on the strength of the popular sector, referring to them as the "ruling bourgeoisie." Similarly, the Strike Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy asserts, "The post revolutionary Mexican state has always served the bourgeoisie..."²⁷⁷ The unequal state of education, the economy, and Mexicans' standard of living illustrated to students that the lower classes had minimal leverage within policy considerations. The strength of the elite was also understood to be inhibiting the political participation of the majority of the Mexican people, a promise made by the Mexican Revolution. Híber Conteris, writing for a Spanish newspaper, stated, "The national bourgeoisie, having captured control of the government, has managed to dominate it with populist slogans and vertical organizations that are controlled directly from above. This populist ideology, characteristic of the Mexican Revolution, does not dispense with mass participation, but limits itself to using it for its own interests."²⁷⁸ Reflected in the words of

²⁷⁶ Bo Anderson and James D. Cockcroft, "Control and Cooptation in the Mexican System" in *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations*, ed. Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 302; Hellman, 48.

²⁷⁷ "Strike Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy..." 10.

²⁷⁸ Híber Conteris, "Mexico: New Outbreak of the Student Rebellion," *Marcha* 30:1418 (September 21, 1968), in *NACLA Newsletter* 2:5 (September, 1968): 5.

Híber Conteris, students understood the influence of business interests within Mexico as a challenge to the political autonomy of the lower classes. As illustrated in the structure of their own organization, CNH, students believed that vertical organizations controlled from above limited popular participation. In order to ensure the formation of a strong commitment to democratic practice in Mexico, political power needed to be dispersed. Ultimately, this would increase representation and challenge the hold of business interests within the government, two primary aims of the students' political project.

In correlation with the strength of business interests, a concentration of power at the executive level also limited mass participation and representation in government. Bo Anderson and James Cockcroft suggest that although interest groups such as those in the popular sector constituted an important force in Mexican politics, the power this group held was only of secondary importance and that the primary power source was in fact the inner circle of the ruling party. In elaboration they explain that interest groups were responsible for voicing demands but ultimately the decision on how to act was promulgated by the party's inner circle.²⁷⁹ Others, however, draw less of a distinction between elite influences and the party's inner circle, arguing that participation in the inner circle is the pinnacle of bourgeois strength.²⁸⁰ The inner circle, also referred to as the revolutionary family or revolutionary coalition, consisted of a group of men who advised the president on all important policy decisions. The influence of the revolutionary family superseded that of any interest group, political organization, and even the official party.²⁸¹ Thus, in the presence of such a strong authority, this group of elite men muffled the voice of

²⁷⁹ Anderson, 302.

²⁸⁰ Judith Hellman suggests that business elite exert the most influence through the placement of political representatives within the inner circle. Development policies, which have advanced bourgeois interests, are illustrative of this relationship. Correspondingly, David Lorey seems to distinguish a professional class of politicians from the inner circle composed of the bourgeois businessmen themselves. Hellman, 55.

²⁸¹ Hellman, 56.

other sectors, especially the working class.

The executive branch in México, particularly the inner circle, exhibited a tremendous concentration of power. Gonzales Casanova provides a sense of how students perceived the distribution of power in México. He writes,

Congress is controlled by the president; the states are controlled by the Federation; the municipalities are controlled by the states and the Federation. In sum, the model of the three powers, the system of counterweights and balances, or the local government of elector-citizens conceived by the philosophers and legislators of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries does not obtain. What does obtain is a concentration of power—in ascending order—in the government, the central government, the executive branch, and the presidency. With the exception of the limitation imposed by the Supreme Court in particular cases...an analysis of the power structure in México would show the president as exercising unlimited power.²⁸²

Delving into greater detail Gonzales Casanova articulates a conception of México's political structure that stands in contradiction to traditional democratic models. The structure he depicts is largely dependent on the executive branch and thus fails to act as a protective system of checks and balances. According to Gonzales Casanova states are entirely dependent on the central government not only militarily but also politically and financially. The governor, for example, is largely controlled by the federal government, which can simply depose of a governor by various means if chosen. Zone commanders who are appointed agents of the federal government watch over state governors, subjecting local authorities to a degree of military control.²⁸³ The autonomy of governors is also constrained by feelings of indebtedness to the president for their appointments, consequently influencing governors to act in conformity with the presidential

²⁸² Casanova, 31.

²⁸³ Ibid, 26.

agenda.²⁸⁴

Reliance on federal aid further places states and governors dependent on the central government. Gonzales Casanova explains that states received aid based on their “economic status,” meaning that more advanced and wealthy states receive greater aid.²⁸⁵ He also suggests that the political affiliation of a governor could serve to influence the amount of aid received. Either way, the less funding a state receives, the less effective state government can function, thus reducing the representative capabilities at the state level. Particularly problematic to Gonzales Casanova was the loss of the free municipalities and the “classical model of local government.”²⁸⁶ Surviving since Spanish imperialism, municipalities formed the primary social and political organization, gaining greater importance after the Mexican Revolution when the Constitution granted municipalities autonomy.²⁸⁷ Therefore, the intervention of federal forces, due to decreasing funds, resembled a violation of revolutionary ideals and inhibited democratic organization. Students adhered to the understanding that small local organizations were central for recognizing the needs of the people; this is illustrated in the local representative bodies of CNH that coordinated popular support. A loss of municipal autonomy then, also inhibited the representative reach of local government, further challenging the formation of a working class political organization. Ultimately, Gonzales Casanova understands the importance of local participation to the ideals promoted by the student movement. Without local representation, participatory democracy is hindered.

The loss of local authority to federal control was compounded by the ineffectiveness of

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 27.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 26.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 30. The functioning of municipalities illustrates complications with funding. Resulting from reductions in aid, many municipalities would lose the ability to maintain basic government functions. As a result, federal forces would seize control of local government, leaving municipalities entirely dependent on the federal government.

²⁸⁷ Hamnet, 238.

larger government bodies. Gonzales Casanova asserts that since the presidency of Álvaro Obregón the legislature had been under complete control of the executive branch. After closely examining legislative activity between 1934 and 1960, he concludes that the majority of the legislative bills proposed by the president passed unanimously. He also notes that bills that did not have unanimous support never generated opposition greater than 5 percent.²⁸⁸ Therefore, Gonzales Casanova argues, the Chamber of Representatives clearly maintained little actual value. Rather, the Chamber merely served a “theoretical” purpose to create the appearance of legality.²⁸⁹ A similar ineffectiveness is noted in the court system, suggesting that judges generally favored acts coming from the executive. Even the Supreme Court tended to adhere to the policy of the executive.²⁹⁰ The unequal distribution of power between different branches of the government is just one of many issues that motivated young activists like Gonzales Casanova to become politically active and demand democratic reform of these key government branches.

IV Opposition Parties: A Challenge to México’s One-Party System

The concentration of power at the executive level was exacerbated by the absence of oppositional forces and the dominance of a single party in México’s political system. A participant in the movement, Professor M. Mayagoitia, questions if there had ever been a solid democratic tradition in Mexico, considering that there was only one political party.²⁹¹ The single-party system that existed in México during the 1950s and 1960s stands in contradiction to the ideals envisioned by students. Political parties, generally centered on a guiding ideology, organize to represent the interests of various populations of voters. In México, however, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) held a monopoly of power for decades, diminishing

²⁸⁸ Casanova, 21.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 20.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 23-24.

²⁹¹ Poniowska, 11.

representative capabilities of the government. The party's dominance was largely secured through the absence of a strong viable political party to challenge the PRI. UNAM graduate Rafael Segovia contends in his exposition on the university and politics in México that a political organization capable of mobilizing popular support did not exist in México.²⁹² General consensus largely supports Segovia. Gonzales Casanova, for example, states, "To the present there has been no indication of the emergence of a classical party system."²⁹³ In support of his claim Casanova references election results to illustrate that only in 1952 were oppositional forces able to poll more than 25 percent of the vote.²⁹⁴ Without institutional strength, he reasons, oppositional parties remain mere pressure groups.²⁹⁵ Thus, while oppositional groups existed these organizations failed to become a strong enough force to challenge the power of the PRI, mobilizing students to contest the diminished representation within México.

Considering the importance of representation and the development of a multi-party system to the student's political project, mobilization against the PRI's involvement in the limiting of oppositional forces was paramount. Observers in the 1960s attributed the curtailment of oppositional groups to forms of cooption and repression.²⁹⁶ Cooption entails attempts by the PRI to appropriate ideas proposed by oppositional groups into the PRI's leadership and decision-making processes. In doing so the support that could be gained from the promotion of these new elements is gained by the PRI at the expense of other political parties, thereby undermining the influence of possible threats posed by oppositional organizations. These dissident groups submit to integration in the hopes that their interests will be institutionalized by the PRI, however,

²⁹² Segovia, 310.

²⁹³ Casanova, 13.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 13.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 12.

²⁹⁶ Bo Anderson and James Cockcroft argue that the PRI has inhibited political parties from challenging their political dominance through a process of cooptation. Anderson and Cockcroft designate cooption a "mechanism of control" used to assimilate contentious elements; Anderson, 304.

commentators question how often the PRI actually follows through.²⁹⁷ Additionally the PRI has been known to express a measure of recognition to political organizations as long as these groups do not constitute a serious threat. For example, the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) a conservative opposition party, was generally tolerated by the PRI. In fact, PAN managed to attract significant support during the late 1960s, winning electoral victories on the state and local level. However, these gains were inadequate to challenge the PRI.²⁹⁸ The official party's toleration of PAN was largely an exception, rooted in PAN's conservative politics. Other organizations that were openly hostile to the PRI did not receive the same support. For example, one political campaign of the opposition party, Frente Electoral del Pueblo (FEP), was banned by the PRI. When FEP announced their own presidential candidate in 1964 the party was prevented from registering as a legal political party.²⁹⁹

In addition, the PRI used their control over legislation to inhibit oppositional organizations. For example, the PRI continued to employ Article 145 of the penal code—originally implemented by President Manuel Avila Camacho to protect against internal subversion during war—as a tool against dissident voices. Utilized most extensively during the 1960s this measure was used to target leftist activists in attempt to curb political protest. Experiencing the repressive nature of this law first hand, the dismissal of Article 145 constituted one of the key demands of the student youth movement. Margarita Suzan in her synopsis of student activities between July and October of 1968 refers to continual student struggles against Article 145 and its unconstitutionality.³⁰⁰ Writing on behalf of a coalition of intellectuals and

²⁹⁷ Anderson, 304.

²⁹⁸ Anderson, 303, 305; A change in the electoral system, put into effect for the first time in 1964, guarantees that some officially “approved” opposition groups get representation in the federal chamber of deputies.

²⁹⁹ Anderson, 304-305.

³⁰⁰ Gudalupe Acevedo and Margarita Suzan, “Relación de los hechos: July-Octubre 1968,” in *Mexico: Conflicto estudiantil 1968: documentos y reacciones de prensa*, comp. Tarsicio Ocampo (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969), 4/51.

artists, Juan Rulfo similarly contested the nature of the law, calling for the removal of Article 145. He states that any activity or “intellectual manifestations” that challenges the official rhetoric was labeled as “subversive” and consequently subject to punishment.³⁰¹ This policy, Juan Rulfo contends, inhibited political representation, preventing the emergence of a diversification of ideological, literary, and scientific sectors.³⁰² Activists participating in the student youth movement clearly interpreted the repressive nature of the law as inhibiting public expression. Public expression and the sharing of ideas allow for collective organization, and together constitute important components of a participatory democracy. Authoritarian measures to restrict such activity challenged the idealized society of students.

In the absence of influential labor unions and workers’ political parties México’s lower and middle classes had few constitutional mediums for political representation. Gonzales Casanova concludes that mediators and negotiators are the only means for marginal populations to voice their concerns, leaving the majority with few options for political participation.³⁰³ Most individuals ultimately resorted to public protest as one of the few viable means of challenging the dominance of business interests within the government.³⁰⁴ As part of their own political protest, CNED recognized that without representative organizations, the people were largely left out of the political process. CNED students observed, “From a political point of view, [Mexico] lacks a democratic system that allows for popular participation in the solving of our nation’s most serious problems.”³⁰⁵ The democratic government envisioned by CNED and the student movement in general, necessitated equal participation, designating that every citizen should have

³⁰¹ Rulfo, 4/121.

³⁰² Rulfo, 4/121.

³⁰³ Casanova, 128.

³⁰⁴ Donald Mabry instructs that productive political participation was denied even to beneficiaries of economic development such as students and the greater middle class. He asserts that the strength of the PRI precluded any influence of students on national policy. Mabry, 235.

³⁰⁵ Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, *Por la reforma y democraticización*, 17.

an equal influence on political decisions and the direction of the country. However, without political autonomy or an organizational body to defend the interests of the people, business elite easily influenced government policy to the detriment of the working class. Thus, students denounced Mexico's single-party system for diminishing the political autonomy of many Mexicans and ultimately inhibiting participatory democracy. Students understood democracy as being the most essential component for the developed society they envisioned, consequently inspiring youth to protest the political structure of Mexico.

CONCLUSION: The Continuities of a Capitalist System: Political Protest in México and the United States

“All of us were reborn on October 2. And on that day we also decided how we are all going to die: fighting for genuine justice and democracy.” –Raúl Álvarez Garín of CNH³⁰⁶

Examining the various forces radicalizing student activism helps to advance the current historiography of the student movement by complicating attempts to define youth activism as apolitical. Donald Mabry and Evelyn Stevens attribute student activism to educational matters, and accordingly conclude that the movement was self-interested rather than political. However, closer examinations of student discontent demonstrate that educational concerns reflect a deep engagement with society. Students called for a reformed educational system that served a public good. They envisioned a university experience that would allow them to develop into informed political actors that could contribute to development and Mexican society. Further, by historicizing the movement, this study illustrates that students were mobilized by more traditional political concerns as well, including economic policy and government organization. Sources illustrate that students actively critiqued and vocalized their own opinions concerning course content, employment, and economic inequality, challenging Jeremi Suri’s labeling of youth activism as an unauthentic, regurgitation of intellectual thought.

Recognizing the political nature of the movement reveals that the active participation of students within Mexican society was more than a simple “vogue” or self-interested endeavor. Students analyzed and critiqued their communities and the nation, proposed reforms, and organized to demand change. However, focusing exclusively on the political character obscures a complete understanding of student activism. Therefore it is equally important to acknowledge the cultural elements as well. Eric Zolov in his book, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of Mexican*

³⁰⁶ Poniowska, 316.

Counterculture, suggests that the movement had two distinct phases of political and cultural participation, arguing that after the massacre students joined the counterculture as a means of expressing discontent. Without the opportunity for public protest and political debate, precluded by the massacre's dismantling of the movement, students participated in the "hippie" culture, partaking in rock n' roll, drug use, and sexual freedom. Zolov's study is informative in that he positions the student movement within the transnational experience of the 1960's counterculture. However, rather than delineating between a political and cultural period of activism, the history of the student movement can be improved by understanding cultural challenges to social values posed by Mexico's youth, as constituting an element of a larger political project in and of itself. A useful example of this is reflected in the participation of women within the counterculture.

Female participation in the counterculture symbolizes more than simply dismissing conservative attire for the newly popular miniskirt and increased sexual liberalization. Rather, the contribution of women represents an important political project. Traditionally Mexican women had been excluded from the political sphere and lived a subordinate position to the male patriarch. However, with the international influence of the feminist movement of the 1960s, Mexican women joined the ranks of the student movement and the counterculture more broadly.³⁰⁷ In an essay "Defining the Space of Mexico '68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and 'Women' in the Streets," Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen interviewed numerous women about their experiences within the movement. Angélica Tirado from the department of Philosophy explained that participation in the movement was intended to alter relationships in

³⁰⁷ Gender discussions have largely been absent from this study despite the participation of both female and male students in the movement. As previously noted, within the movement itself, gender roles were often replicated. Male students assumed the majority of the leadership positions, while women were largely responsible for chores such as preparing of meals. Further, Cohen and Frazier explain that female participation was substantially less at mixed boys and girls schools than at all girls schools, likely because women were intimidated by the male presence. Nonetheless, women were involved actively in student protests and some even gained positions of importance. For example, Roberta Avendaño and Ana Ignacia Rodríguez Marquez were the two female members of the strike council and prominent public figures who helped generate popular support for the movement. Cohen, 639.

their everyday life, particularly within the family and relationships between men and women.³⁰⁸ She elaborated, “We started to question institutions and our own sexual roles.”³⁰⁹ Thus, women were not just radicalized by the concerns of the student movement, but their radicalization also embodied a greater political project in demanding the right to be political actors, and the right to challenge male dominance and gender norms.³¹⁰

Considering the role of women within Mexico’s youth movement illustrates that cultural and political realms are often difficult to separate. Individuals employ cultural expression as a form of political critique, while at the same time the political environment can shape culture expression.³¹¹ Ultimately, the political-cultural dichotomy dominating the historiography of the student youth movement obscures the complex nature of student activism. The purpose of this study has been to expand the history of the student youth movement by moving beyond this dichotomy and historicizing student activism. Historicization unveils a variety of radicalizing forces within this political project, stemming from economic, social, and political concerns, driving students to demand a developed and democratic society that benefited all Mexicans. This realization dismisses activism as being purely political or cultural. Thus, when studying popular movements, historians must be attentive to the various factors radicalizing activism so as not to dilute the diversity of voices within the movement.

³⁰⁸ Cohen, 652.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 652.

³¹⁰ Perhaps an indication of women further challenging their role in society, is captured in career statistics. David Lorey explains that in the twenty years following the peak of student activism women steadily moved away from traditional fields of employment. For instance, among all professional female students the percentage studying secondary education fell from 21.3 percent in 1969 to 17.2 percent in 1990. On the contrary fields traditionally dominated by men, such as business administration exhibited a substantial increase in female enrollments, from 2.3 percent in 1969 to 4.8 percent in 1980. Engineering also experienced similar trends. Lorey, 153-154.

³¹¹ The U.S. propaganda campaign during the Cold War is a clear example of the inseparability of these two realms, as the U.S. exported, manufactured North American culture in an attempt to gain political influence globally.

I Tracing the Parallels Between Contemporary Protest and the Student Youth Movement

Recently in the United States a burgeoning mass movement has begun to take shape, spreading across the country and globally. This movement, referred to as “Occupy Wall Street,” reflects a growing disaffection with economic inequality and American corporatism. Observers seeking to comprehend the essence of this political activism should view the current movement in relation to México’s student youth movement during the 1960s. Together the demands of both of these movements for the reprioritization of business interests, political representation, and the distribution of wealth, call attention to the continual deterioration in the standard of living that results from a capitalist from of economic development.

One of the primary radicalizing forces behind student activism during the 1960s was the government’s preoccupation with economic development. Students challenged the prioritization of domestic and foreign business interests above the needs of the ordinary Mexican people. Students condemned industrial development practices that increased efficiency and profits, often foreign, while failing to generate jobs for Mexican workers. Economic influence on university curriculum equally motivated students to demand courses that both created a productive workforce and met the diverse interests of the student body. Student activists felt that democratic representation and the formation of political organizations to represent the interests of the masses were essential for challenging México’s single-party system and ensure that business interests would not continue to guide the direction of México alone.

Nearly fifty years after México’s student movement, “Occupy Wall Street” activists are echoing similar concerns. The removal of corporate influence is the foremost radicalizing force in the U.S. today. Disenchantment with economic practices instituted for the benefit of big business is often being articulated in the demand for the regulation of “free trade” economics.

Many are angered at the exportation of American jobs during a time of such high unemployment. These practices, according to some activists, allow for corporations to generate larger profits from cheap foreign labor at the expense of working class needs in the U.S. People are demanding business operations that meet the needs of domestic concerns rather than simply for the generation of economic gains for the few, reflecting a similar critique voiced by Mexican students in the 1960s.

Activists are also demanding an end to the practice of corporate personhood which grants corporations the legal status of a “person.” Originally intended to aid in contract agreements and allow for corporations to be persecuted for crimes they commit, activists contend corporate personhood has allowed for the corruption of the 14th amendment of the U.S. constitution. Most troubling, in the recent Supreme Court ruling, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, corporations have been granted the right to contribute an unlimited amount of funds towards political campaigns. Similar to student condemnation in the 1960s, the unrestrained influence of business interests secured through campaign contributions stands to further diminish the representation of ordinary people in the U.S. More politicians are accepting corporate contributions to maintain a competitive stance, thus entangling their political careers with corporate obligations. The undeniable outcome of such a system will be the continual prioritization of business interests, leaving the working class unrepresented.

Demands for distribution of wealth constitute another important radicalizing force among Mexican youth and activists today. Students in México condemned unfair taxation and low wages for contributing to a diminished standard of living for México’s masses. Tax reform and the removal of foreign influence in México, students asserted, was necessary to distribute wealth and provide revenue for social spending in order to improve social conditions within the country.

A gross concentration of wealth has equally radicalized the Occupy Wall Street movement. In order to encourage a more equitable distribution of wealth, protesters are demanding progressive taxation. Reminiscent of México's youth, activists desire tax rates that increase as the amount taxed increases in an effort to shift the tax burden from the lower classes to the wealthy. Correspondingly, the current movement is calling for the elimination of tax loopholes that allow corporations to evade taxation. A more just system of taxation, as outlined by activists, would allow for the generation of greater revenues, decrease budget deficits, and augment social spending.

Disgruntled with the direction of our nation and lacking political avenues to effect change, North Americans have resorted to public protest to demand a government responsive to the needs of the people. The direction of this movement is not entirely foreseeable as activists and observers struggle to determine how the movement should be presented. Commentators are calling for the formation of a unified voice and single overarching goal. However, taken from the example of the student youth movement in México we should be cautious of attempting to confine current activism within the boundaries of a single message. The reoccurring assertion that student protest was purely in response to police brutality creates an illusion of uniformity when, in fact, students were radicalized by a diversity of interests. For that reason, current activists must resist attempts to confine their concerns to a single demand, and support heterogeneity within the movement.

Ultimately, the demands of México's student activists and the current Occupy Wall Street movement have much in common. The parallels between the two movements illustrate the continuous impact of the capitalist system on the people and the formation of class identity. To return once again to the words of Gonzales Casanova,

The self adjusting mechanism which characterized the European and American

development of capitalist countries is aided by democratic interplay and democratic organization of trade unions, and it forces the state and the entrepreneurs to make more and greater concessions to the masses to make social investments to increase salaries to enact tax laws that will bring about dynamic egalitarianism. In México this mechanism does not operate with the same efficiency. Government decisions regarding development are made on the basis of a far more limited view of equality, which is, in fact, a view far closer to inequality.³¹²

According to Gonzales Casanova inequality is not an inevitable product of a capitalist system. Rather, when trade unions and other egalitarian measures are in existence, the emergence of an exploited class can be evaded. The growth of inequality in México, then, was the result of the inability of the Mexican government to balance capitalist development with democratic principles. Unfortunately, as the current movement illustrates, the United States exhibits the same failures that Gonzales Casanova attributes to the Mexican government. Guided by business interests and global market competition, the U.S. appears to be gradually moving away from democratic mechanisms to foster an economy deeply weakened by growing inequality. The current world condition leaves observers to question if capitalism and inequality are mutually exclusive.

³¹² Casanova, 144.

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