

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN “MENEMISTA” ARGENTINA: EDUCATIONAL POLITICS IN THE NINETIES*

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the last century Argentina, like many other Latin American countries, initiated important reforms in their educational system¹. In general, these reforms were imposed by international organizations to solve financial problems and they were oriented to opening educational services to private competition.² Even if in most cases the governments that introduced the educational reforms had a clear neo-liberal approach to economic policy, the fact is that the role of the state in education was not diminished. This was especially true in Argentina during the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-1999). Menem, who belonged to the *Justicialista* Party, assumed power in 1989 at the height of a social and economic crisis that was precipitated by hyperinflation and financial chaos. Once in power, President Menem used effective macroeconomic policies to recover stability while emphasizing the role of the private sector in economic activity. In the case of education, it is believed that privatization was encouraged by the decentralization of secondary education and the reform of higher education system.

Most of academic works dealing with the new educational regulations argue that “educational transformation”, as it was called by government officials, meant the victory of Neo-liberal State over Welfare State. Certainly, from the ideological perspective of Social State, education is a public good and hence, the state has to intervene thoroughly.³ For these authors, the modernization of the educational system in the nineties diminished the power of Federal State.⁴ Education became a commodity and the public system collapsed⁵. In this article, we argue that it would be rather incorrect to affirm that decision making related to the education system was radically transferred to private sector and that the state suffered a loss of power in educational matters. On the one hand, Provincial

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governments took charge of secondary schools while privatization in the interior did not grow significantly⁶. On the other hand, the Federal State intervened at higher education levels not only by setting up evaluation measures but also by regulating the administration of national universities and the developing of private ones. In the case of countries like Chile and Brazil, education policies were designed by neo-liberal governments, but government’s decision-making power in this area was not reduced. These policies entailed the decentralization of secondary schools and stimulated private and state universities to determine education alternatives different from the existing ones. However, the state continued to intervene by using instruments such as subsidies, evaluation, financial support and the general management of education or governance.⁷

This article analyzes the so called “modernization” of secondary and higher education in Argentina during the Presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem by examining the norms and the congressional discussion of educational laws. Previously, we review both the theoretical framework which justifies the correlation between political ideas an education and the congressional discussion on federal and higher education laws. We conclude that politics in education in the nineties changed the role of government to that of encouraging private alternatives in secondary and higher education while the state still retained important decision- making power. Although opposition in Congress thought otherwise, our hypothesis is that the role of the state neither diminished nor increased. We should say, rather, it became less centralized and more opened to educational alternatives, mostly private, but also got involved in controlling and evaluating. It set up strategies to adapt education to the rules of globalization, dictated mainly by international financial organizations. However, the state failed to envisage a firm and decisive vision of what kind of student Argentina needed to overcome its recession. In other words, it changed the system substantially to update the organization to a more competitive international model but it lacked a strategic educational policy for the future of Argentina.

II. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The discussion about the role of the state and the critics on neo-liberal reforms are based on the following arguments: 1) there is a close relationship between politics and education; 2) no education is neutral ideologically; 3) educational reforms and systems reveal a certain *weltanschauung*⁸ or conception of the world, 4) education has been used by political elites to achieve certain objectives.

It is always useful to go back to classical Greek philosophy, the principal source of Western thinking to understand some issues of political science. For Aristotle, Politics was a practical science belonging to Philosophy. The object of Politics was the state, that is, the most important and perfect community on Earth. Its importance derived from the fact that its end was the Common Good which, as it incorporated the whole community, subordinated all the personal and familiar goods to it.⁹ Classic Philosophy also held the view that politics had tools to seek its Good. One of these was education. It was so because education internalized the values of society in mankind. Moreover, as the Common Good varied throughout time and places, it was through education that people were made adjust to not only universal values but also to those ideals a concrete community pursued at a certain time in a certain place. Later on, with the growing popularity of sociology in the USA including the birth of the “Great Theory” of Talcott Parsons in the middle of twentieth century, education was studied properly. For Parsons, education was part of a social system which gave legitimacy to the values of society. It worked as a filter of those ideas and thoughts which could be disrupting. The ultimate end of systems and subsystems was equilibrium. Education was a means of adapting people to society so that society could survive. As we can see, it did not differ from philosophical point of view.¹⁰ For Marxism instead, education was part of a superstructure, which in Marxist language contained those values and ideologies created by the oppressive class to maintain the exploitation of the Proletarian or what Marx called “*false consciousness*”.

New sociological trends reinforced this conception. In their book “*The Reproduction*”, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, who had a Marxist orientation, argue that education is a system of symbols that do not reflect reality and that it is violently imposed on individuals in what they called “*symbolic violence*”. The term meant that the embedded value systems ensured the hegemony of certain power relations. Those who were politically or economically excluded from the elite could only receive education tainted by certain ideas which supported the power of the elite¹¹. Notwithstanding how education worked in a capitalist world, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian pedagogue found a way in which education could be turned into a liberalizing tool. He adapted education for the sake of the poor. What he called “pedagogy for the oppressed” tried to bridge the gap between rich and poor through interesting methodologies.¹² Analyzing educational reforms in Latin America, Daniel Filmus, the current Argentine Minister of Education, claimed there was another model with which to interpret the relationship between society and education that was from a structuralistic stance (Parsons) or a critical- reproductive one (Bourdieu, Passeron etc). It

was not exactly a new model because he thought that there was not only one way to approach the political-educational duality. The new perspective was based on the fact that the state did not play the leading role in educational politics. Students, their families, and the media had a significant and decisive role as public organizations. It all depended on when and where educational reforms were adopted. For instance, on the one hand, educational transformation in Latin America appeared to have widened up the gap between social classes. On the other hand, though, there was an increase in the number of youngsters from lower classes who stayed at school longer and of students who went to university. In short, this goes to prove that micro-sociological studies and field research are needed to evaluate the consequences of public policies in education.¹³

It is a fact that the state without the consent of society is incapable of putting programs into effect. Education legitimizes any given ideology and the political actions derived from it. As a consequence, education is never impartial. Even those who consider state education in Argentina to be the least biased because it upholds freedom of creed and is open to all kind of educational alternatives, are guided by a certain conception of life which dominated the scene during the last century. Laicism, nationalism and faith in progress were, among others, the values instilled by education in the nineties and twenties centuries. As it is well known, political elites decide not only which values people should adopt but also what concrete objectives a certain society should pursue. In the nineteenth century, Argentinean leaders, the so-called 80's generation, wanted a nation with a great amount of European immigrants, who devoted themselves to developing the local industry while the population in the rural areas continued to exploit its agriculture and stockbreeding. Education was ruled by the following principles: openness to foreigners – mainly European – freedom of speech and creed and also patriotism.

For the United States, leader of the New Frontier in the 1900, the expansion of its territory to the West was justified by the “Manifest Destiny”. The bloody wars against Indians, the intervention in the territory of other countries and the upsurge of American citizens in Mexico were justified in name of Liberty and Democracy. Americans believed in their mission to give freedom and democracy to the world. This feeling was translated to education of many generations of American citizens. Despite the reformist laws and the innovative models of the nineties, Argentina did not reach a consensus on the political formula to carry out its recovery. Elites, consequently, did not agree on the values and projects that were necessary to educate the new generations.

III. THE FEDERAL EDUCATION ACT

Some years later, the reform of the Federal educational system brought about a debate concerning the role of the state. When the project of the Federal Education Law was discussed in Congress, Jorge Rodríguez (PJ), the congressman representing La Pampa, outlined the main proposals of the draft: first, to extend the school-leaving age to fifteen years old and second, to decentralize the system by transferring management from the federal government to that of the provinces and the Municipality of Buenos Aires city. The extension of the education in the *Educación General Básica* (EGB) pursued to main objectives, namely, to give more students access to an education and provide them with job opportunities after graduation. As to decentralization, Rodríguez argued that the government wanted to follow up the suggestions of the 1984 Pedagogical Congress.¹⁴ This meeting emphasized the need for the decentralization of both contents and management. The reasons given were, among others, that the needs of former centralization of secondary school had not allowed local governments to adapt education to regional characteristics.

Although Rodríguez recognized that the Ministry of Education would be a Ministry without schools, the state would participate within the *Consejo Federal de Educación* (Federal Education Council), formed by the ministers of each province under the presidency of the Minister of the Nation, to design the minimal common national curriculum content.¹⁵ In an attempt to make education more accessible to people on a lower social strata, Rodríguez announced important policies such as helping provincial educational budget with national revenue, giving scholarships to students and increasing the national educational budget dependent on the increase in economic production. To a certain extent, thus, the government tried to emulate the US educational system where the states are in charge of education in their own territory. The Federal Department of Education is devoted to solving problems of the low -income population by launching special programs such as the most recent one whose slogan was “no child without education”.

The first attack on the project was launched when the opposition (*Union Cívica Radical* (UCR) and leftist parties) argued that Federal Government’s withdrawal from primary and secondary education was due to financial reason. They thought that decentralization of primary and secondary schools was decided to restrict the Federal budget. The government overlooked the fact that the majority of provinces did not have enough revenue to afford an increase in expenditure and it was not clear how the Federal Government would distribute the surplus. The government

was accused of paying more attention to the economy than to education while subordinating educational policy to fiscal needs.

Other opponents objected to the biased nature of the law. They claimed that the educational reform was underpinned by neo-liberal ideas. As with other economic activities Menem’s neo liberal government considered the private sector to be more efficient at dealing with education. Therefore, the law encouraged different educational project in both private and state schools. But naturally, private institutions would have more freedom than the public ones administered by Provincial governments. For many congressional representatives, the Federal State should impose stricter policies than those implemented by provinces and the private sector.¹⁶

Ironically, leftist parties (*Socialista, Intransigente*) were the ones which believed that educational policies during the conservative era, in the last decades of ninetieth century, made more sense than the ones Menem was trying to impose. It is worth mentioning here that during the so called “eighties generation” political elites, all of them conservative, reformed education to serve the needs of the country. With an emerging economy based on cattle rearing and agriculture and with the influx of large numbers of immigrants yearly, it was clear that Argentina needed to adapt its educational system to the new circumstances. The political elite acted consequently creating a system, which, in the long run, gave the citizenship to the children of European immigrants and leveled off classes. The Menemist reform instead sought a dual model in which people with average and high incomes would be able to have high educational standards whereas the rest of the population would not get adequate training for the labor market.¹⁷ This approach to education was christened *privatista* because it seemed to pave the way for religious and lay education and the left considered it as “elitist”, “clerical” and “discriminatory”.¹⁸

Not only leftists but also members of moderate radicalism wanted the state to act directly and not through the private sector. In that way, the market would not displace the state in providing education as it occurred in “neoconservative states”.¹⁹ In the Senate, Cendoya argued that the state had withdrawn from primary education and that now, they were doing the same with secondary education. State education would only intervene through the consultative body, the Federal Council of Education. Another point raised was the inadequacy of the law to provide provinces with financial resources. It was stated that the educational budget would get increased financial resources, depending on economic growth. However, given that the national budget was discussed every year in congressional session it would be impossible to guarantee the allocation of the needed funds.²⁰

According to a survey canvassing 250 public and private secondary school authorities in the Conurbation of Buenos Aires²¹, a 74% of heads and other officials considered the law to have had negative effects. Three out of ten argued that the level of education had declined since the law was implemented. An outstanding 63% considered that the state needed to intervene in order to learn what the problems of education were. State intervention was translated into requests for information, sending inspectors to schools and assessing student's performance. This kind of intervention was deemed pointless to solve problems at primary and secondary school education.²² However, the survey seems to show that the state, in this case, the provincial state, continued to be in close contact with both public and private secondary schools but the state seemed to be misguided. Besides, another interesting point is that far from neglecting funding and consulting, the Federal State was still the principal financial agent through subsidies, fellowships, and compensatory policies. The Secretariat of Education, for instance, comprises three undersecretaries. One of them is the undersecretary of equity and quality whose function is "executing national programs to compensate educational and socioeconomic inequalities" through the Department of Compensatory Programs. It also coordinates the system of educational evaluation through the information and evaluation department.²³ School authorities were dissatisfied with the law, however. The government did not seem to seek their support by interchanging ideas about dealing with difficulties. They viewed these authorities as merely being interested in improving attendance.

From our point of view, the new law was made under the conception that the Federal State should let provincial, local governments and private sector impart education in the way they deemed appropriate. This idea sprang from the belief that the Federal Government had been a bad administrator and had misused its resources. Comparing the educational modernization of Menem with the one adopted by *generación del ochenta*, it is clear that the 19th century programs were better suited to their times. In those years, conservative politicians having been brought up on positivism and scientism believed in the power of reason. Therefore, education was the only way an underdeveloped country such as Argentina would be able to grow economically and socially. Education, then, was defined as a tool of politics and revolutionary action.

In the case of Federal Education Law, politicians wanted to change and modernize education but, as it became apparent in Congress they did not see eye to eye on the changes they wanted to make. Supporters of the law were in favor of the idea of decentralizing secondary schools in order

to improve the standards of education and allowing local governments and private institutions to adapt their syllabi to their needs. They also stimulated the creation of new alternatives. Defenders of the Welfare State, convinced that private initiatives could be dangerous in widening up the gap between the rich and the poor, thought that education had to be controlled by the state. The results were chaotic. Although the number of students in secondary school did grow, the standards of education fell dramatically. According to *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos* (INDEC) the most prestigious and reliable official statistics institute, only 12% of inhabitants of Argentina finished secondary school in 1991. Ten years later, this figure had reached 16%.

As for quality, a study showed that it is difficult to compare students' annual evaluations because of the lack of standardized examination.²⁴ However, students have more difficulty to pass the university entrance exams and a worried Minister of Education encourages schools to make agreements with universities so that they will improve the standard by providing students with introductory courses to improve performances.

IV. THE DEBATE ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.

Continuing with renovation, the government put forward a project for a new university education law in Congress in 1995. The project endeavored to change both the state and private university system.

Historically, Argentina was one of the Latin American countries with the biggest percentage of university students. According to World Bank data, Argentina nearly attained universal primary education (90% in 1991); secondary school net enrollment was 56% and about 20% of the age group 20-25 was in higher education.²⁵ Universities were founded in Argentina during colonial years. The first one was the University of Córdoba ruled by Jesuits. Later, in 1821, the University of Buenos Aires, which has the largest student body, opened its doors in the capital city. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a revolution took place in Argentine universities when the Reform, a social movement lead by a type of radicalism that was imbedded in ideas of positivism, modified higher education. As a result, universities obtained more autonomy from political institutions and faculty and students were able to participate in the governance of universities.

When Juan Domingo Peron took office in the forties, he launched a series of policies to give the poor access to university. He established free tuition and created new universities such as the Labor University, later called Technological, in which working class people had possibilities of doing technical courses and programs. In addition, prestigious state universities such as Universidad Nacional de Tucumán in northwest

Argentina and Universidad Nacional del Sur in Bahía Blanca city were founded. In 1958, the state's hegemony for supplying university education ended after a period of turmoil when President Frondizi authorized private higher institutions of learning in the country. Consequently, many universities founded by the Church and social groups were established all over the country.

The autonomy of state universities suffered intensively when the military government intervened in universities in the sixties during the Presidency of General Juan Carlos Onganía. In those days, many professors were dismissed and were forced to go to Europe and the USA. Some of them became very important in their fields, for example, César Milstein, 1984 Nobel Prize in Medicine. When democracy was re-established in 1984, universities enjoyed a period of freedom and autonomy. The University of Buenos Aires (UBA), the most prestigious one, was in the hands of the official party, radicalism, and maintained its hegemony all through Alfonsín's and Menem's Administrations. The university became a bulwark of radicalism and a strong opponent of Menem's Administration. The control of the students association was largely in the hands of the radical student's faction, Franja Morada. They were very critical of the neo-liberal policies set up by Menemism.

But the whole system was chaotic. State universities' budgets were increasing while the rate of drop-outs was high and the rate of graduates was stagnant. Student population rose sharply making it difficult for the state to handle it. Private institutions increased under the encouragement of educational administration officials. For example, the president established specific rules for the creation of private universities which accelerated the foundation of many of them.²⁶

New rules were badly needed and the Minister of Education submitted a project for regulating the changed scenario. The aims of the law can be broken down into three. One, the modernization of higher education according to the standards of Europe and the USA; second, the centralization of higher education policy in the national Ministry of Education and the intervention in the governance of the University of Buenos Aires.

The modernization of education was carried out so that Argentine standards reached those of European and US standards. The search for quality converged with the need for new graduates for a market-oriented country, and the efficient use of the educational budget. The renovation movement was particularly influenced by international cultural and financial organizations. On the one hand, United Nations for the Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) and the Economic

Commission for Latin America (ECLA) recommended a reform aimed at increasing the number of university students and the promotion of equity. On the other hand, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and World Bank played a far more decisive role in Latin American reforms conditioning loans to more effective management and organization. In recent years, UNESCO and ECLA have lost political decision-taking power due to the debt crisis in Latin America and to the fact that international financial organizations have replaced them in their role of advisors²⁷. Neither state universities nor private complied with the specifications of international organizations. They lacked good buildings, libraries, research facilities and their faculty consisted mainly of free-lance teachers. Their salaries were so low that in most cases, they had to supplement their income by taking another job.

Most Latin American countries began to reform their systems following the same recipes: higher education laws, evaluation agencies, private investment in universities, new types of education such as distance education, economic planning in cooperation with economic corporations and so on.²⁸ Joining the global market required however more and better qualified professionals. New economy-oriented research work would create and increase employment opportunities in these fields and would therefore solve the problem of unemployment.

There were serious problems with the number of graduates in Argentina. Although the budget for university education was considerable, the rate of desertion was very high and students' average length of stay at school was too long. A report from the World Bank highlighted these problems. The loan for renovating the technological communication networks of state universities would depend on changes in the system of higher education.²⁹

State centralization was another characteristic of the law of university education. As it was pointed out by members of Congress, the Ministry of Education was the principal agency for the organization of universities. The Secretary for Higher Education Policies played a very important role in granting subsidies for research work and in distributing them according to the assessment of the *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria* (CONEAU). Besides, it worked in close connection with this government evaluation body.

Finally, counterbalancing the political influence of University of Buenos Aires was the other ulterior motive of the transformation of higher education. Since Alfonsín Presidency, the President of the UBA was a member of *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR) and the majority of the students' associations were controlled by "*Franja Morada*". Problems between the

President of the UBA, Oscar Shuberoff, and former president Menem began once the latter took over in 1989.

Menem and some peronist representatives in Congress wanted to curtail Shuberoff's power. During the debate of the law, a point was raised: the UBA spent the money available unwisely on expensive projects. For example, the *Ciclo Básico Común* (CBC), a type of remedial entrance course intended to raise the level of students entering university, accounted for 20% of the budget³⁰. The higher education law was aimed at limiting the chances of the UBA to destabilize the regime. To achieve this purpose, norms for electing the president of the UBA were established thus minimizing both Shuberoff's power and that of the student's associations, which were led by Franja Morada and, needless to say, supported Shuberoff. Another way to undermine Shuberoff's power was to allow deans of different faculties to solve budget problems by restricting entrance to courses. Such was the case with Luis Ferreira, Dean of the School of Medicine in UBA in 1995. Finally, many state universities were established in the conurbation of Buenos Aires. Although these measures were necessary to decentralize the huge population in the UBA, most of these regional universities were organized by academics who sympathized with peronist politicians.

The discussion in Congress revolved around three main topics: Autonomy versus intervention; free university education versus tuition fees and evaluation systems. The first issue was discussed both in the Senate and in the House of Representatives. The radicals defended the autonomy of university. The opposition felt that the university's autonomy, in place since 1918, would be eroded by the education bill. The regulations not only indicated the duration of the course in number of hours but also the configuration of the university council as well as the procedure to be followed in electing university deans. Rules related to the participation of both teachers and students in faculty elections were also stipulated.³¹

The law met strong opposition. Its critics believed that the Ministry of Education itself had to be eliminated.³² However, government officials believed otherwise. They thought that the law was only a framework for developing alternatives in higher education. Besides, it was envisaged that the law would allow universities to decide on their fees, their governance and the creation of new course of studies. The goals the government pursued were the leveling off of students and the organization of university, which they deemed to be a chaotic system. The tool to be used to achieve these purposes was evaluation.³³

Tuition fees provoked another heated discussion. Advocators of free tuition claimed the state should guarantee higher education to low-income

students. Its opponents favored imposing a fee on university students. Paradox ally, some congressmen who were not members of *Justicialismo* (Peronist Party) advocated a tuition free university education reasoning that education would become more accessible to the low-income population as it was in Peron’s times. Conversely, representatives of the official party contended that students could afford to contribute to the university expenditure. They argued that the large majority of the university population came from middle and upper-middle income families, but they nevertheless conceded to fellowship grants for low-income students.³⁴

Finally, the creation of an assessing board brought about long and exhausting debates in Congress. Although, the members of Congress agreed on the need to standardize the quality of university education, the discussions revolved around two important issues: the criterion to evaluate different universities and syllabi and the selection of the members of the evaluation board. The opposition argued that the assessment board should work under the supervision of Congress and therefore, the majority of the members should be chosen by the legislature. Senator Bordón, who in those times led, *Frente Para el País Solidario* (Frepasso), which had split from the *Justicialismo*, considered that the evaluation boards should be composed by scientists proposed by higher education institutions and chosen by Congress.³⁵ Government officials who supported Menem, held the view that the evaluation system should depend directly on the Executive power even if it were to work closely with the Ministry of Education. Its members would be elected by the President, the Congress and some other academic institutions. Finally, without significant amendments, the law was passed on July, 20. 1995.

Congressmen from the opposition held contradictory views on the role of the state. The Menem government was called “neo- Malthusian”, “pseudo-liberal” or representing the “uninterested” state. At the same time, however, they also criticized the intervention of the state in the governance of universities. They argued that the new law embodied neo-liberal policies because the state was not longer in favor of free attendance to university and did not promote knowledge. Representative Rico, a right winger claimed the state disregarded its responsibility and that imposing fees was against public interest. But, he also concluded that the state, despite failing to meet the needs of society had become a truly interventional state as a result of the new norm.³⁶

According to Senator Jorge Cendoya (UCR), the principle of university autonomy had been curtailed by having centralized the education policy in the Minister of Education. Besides, he considered the interference of the federal government in the evaluation process to be excessive.³⁷

Bordón claimed that the law was too comprehensive and was not flexible enough. A proof of this was the large number of articles that constituted the so called, framework.³⁸

Some congressmen considered that the law was embedded in an open-market ideology. Consequently, it encouraged the development of private institutions and made university accessible to a minority in accordance with the World Bank efficiency policies.³⁹

V. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, we conclude that the power of the Executive, and therefore, of the state was modified with the reform of university education. Far from leaving the debate to the political parties represented in Congress or to society at large, as Alfonsín tried to do in the Pedagogic Congresses, the state became directly involved in the modernization of higher education. In other words, the state changed its role from decisive actor in promoting public higher education to guardian of a very rigid and comprehensive reform. The state lost its caring role and became more involved in management and evaluation. As for the consequences of these measures for public good, the defenders of the law claimed that the changes introduced would bring about a noticeable improvement in education.

However, we argue that in following the recipes of international institutions and the current renovation in Europe, the transformation of education did not clearly define the objectives of these changes. We can conclude that the reforms carried out in university education in Argentina were but an attempt to make the country adjust to an ever increasing globalized market. Argentina could no longer afford to remain on the sidelines and ignore the need for renovating university education. However the real purpose for changing the system was not clearly designed. It could be argued that neither the government nor the society as a whole tried to reach any kind of consensus as to what kind of graduate the country required.

Some congressmen did notice this flaw in the law. Congressman Pellin considered that the norm was biased. It followed a model that, in his opinion, pursued professionalism instead of a zeal for learning the Truth. The role of university in such a model was to produce well-qualified professionals capable of competing in a labor market. This strategy could solve the unemployment problem only partially and would do so on a short-term basis. Such model sacrificed advanced knowledge and research which are the only tools to develop long-term solutions.⁴⁰

As some congressmen said, the law did not have a clear and exposed ideology. No model of country or profile of future graduates profiles was outlined in the regulation.⁴¹ Right or wrong, these congressmen pointed out the absence of a discussion about strategic objectives for university education. The debate in Congress lacked depth. It limited itself to making cosmetic changes of words or discussing secondary issues such as fees or autonomy. Very few congressmen and senators stopped to wonder what kind of graduate Argentina needed.⁴² Perhaps, as many members of parliament argued, if Argentina had not followed the suggestions about education made by international financial organizations it would not have had access to international credits. In doing so, however, the need for an in-depth analysis of the future of Argentina was sadly overlooked.

The political elites did not have a clear vision of the kind of country Argentina should be. They did not consider whether Argentina should liberalize or maintain a protective stance through subsidizing both light and strategic industries. They did not assess either whether Argentina should welcome immigration to its deserted regions or whether she should refuse admission to Latin American immigrants. They did not analyze whether Argentina should look up to Europe and the US as models or whether she should forge a tight regional unification.

Rather than discussing evaluation policies, governance of universities or tuition fees, a country must imagine how an education program can launch a progressive developmental policy. Unfortunately, these issues were completely disregarded by the reform. Developed countries have known for many years that light industrialization and an increased exportation of cereals cannot possibly remedy the structural problems of a nation. Argentina, however, has kept this long-abandoned model. Thus, it is incapable of competing with developed countries and the new economies in Southeast Asia that have invested for years in highly sophisticated fields such as engineering, electronic, telecommunication and biogenetics.⁴³

One may conclude that the educational transformation of the nineties failed. However, the cause of the failure laid nor in low quality standards, nor in poor performance, but in the fact that the model to be pursued was neither explicitly nor implicitly designed in accordance with a vision of the type of country policy-makers wished Argentina to be. The Education reform did not have consistency mainly because political elites did not develop a comprehensive plan to launch Argentina into a world where sophisticated technology and science were transforming society. Our feeling is that officials wanted an educational model to increase the number of students in secondary school but they did not think carefully what the contents of secondary schools should be. They wanted a less expensive

higher education but did not point out which professions should be stimulated. They also failed to consider how low-income students would be able to gain access to secondary or go to university.

Thus, as far as education in Argentina is concerned, the Welfare State was replaced by an Evaluator State but this Evaluator State did not give room to Planner or Strategist State. In other words, the state has prevailed over social groups, in spite of the powerful influence they might exert but the state has sadly limited itself to solving minor issues instead of finding long-term solutions.

Notes

UCR: *UNIÓN CÍVICA RADICAL*

PJ: *PARTIDO JUSTICIALISTA*

PI: *PARTIDO INTRANSIGENTE*

FREPASO: *FRENTE PAIS SOLIDARIO*

MPN: *MOVIMIENTO POPULAR NEUQUINO*

MODIN: *MOVIMIENTO POR LA DIGNIDAD Y LA INDEPENDENCIA*

IU: *IZQUIERDA UNIDA*

- 1 Alberto Fernández Lamarra “Higher Education, Quality Evaluation and Accreditation in Latin America and MERCOSUR”, *European Journal of Eduaation*, vol.38, no.3, 2003 and Marcela Mollis (comp.) *Las universidades en América Latina: ¿Reformadas o Alteradas?. La cosmética del poder financiero*. (Buenos Aires, 2003).
- 2 Mark Ginsburg, Oscar Espinoza, Simona Popa and Mayumi Terano, “Privatisation, Domestic Marketisation and International Commercialisation in Higher Education: vulnerabilities and opportunities for Chile and Romania within the framework of WTO/GATS”, *Globalization, Societies and Education*, vol.1, no.3, Nov.2003.
- 3 Daniel Filmus (comp.) *Los condicionantes de la calidad educativa*. (Buenos Aires, 1999); *Cada vez más necesaria, cada vez más insuficiente*. (Buenos Aires, 2001); *Estado, Sociedad y Educación en la Argentina de fin de siglo*. (Buenos Aires, 1996); Mariano Echenique, *La propuesta educativa neoliberal. Argentina (1980-2000)*. (Buenos Aires, 2003); Adriana Puiggrós, *La otra reforma. Desde la educación menemista de fin de siglo*, (Buenos Aires:1997); *Qué pasó con la educación argentina. Breve historia desde la conquista hasta el presente* (Buenos Aires: 2002)
- 4 Filmus, *Estado, Sociedad y Educación....*p.41.
- 5 Puiggrós, *La otra reforma....*pp.21-22
- 6 According to *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos*, (INDEC), private institutions represent only 20% of the total primary and secondary institutions. Of these figures, the conurbation of Buenos Aires and the Capital of the country accounted for 45% of private institutions but in the interior this percentage is lower. Tierra del Fuego has 26% of private institutions but the rest of the provinces have less. (INDEC, *Distribución porcentual de establecimientos y alumnos de todos los tipos de educación por sector, según provincia. Total del país*. Año 2000)
- 7 As Ginsburg et al. analyzes in their article, Chile transformed higher education according to different federal programs.

- 8 It is a German word. It means conception of life. It gives an answer to these elements: man, nature, society and God. It is possible to speak of a Marxist, Christian and Liberal *weltanschauung*.
- 9 Aristóteles, *Política*, Libro I, (Madrid: 1951), p.3.
- 10 Talcott Parsons, *El sistema social* (Madrid:1996).
- 11 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *La reproducción. Elementos de una teoría del sistema de enseñanza*. (Méjico, 1970).
- 12 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido*, (Buenos Aires:1970).
- 13 Filmus *Estado, Sociedad y Educación...* pp. 131-137.
- 14 The Pedagogical Congress was convoked by President Raúl Alfonsín in the early eighties. Representatives of interest groups, government and non-government organizations discussed about the education of the country. The opinion of liberalizing education and letting private and public institutions create educational alternatives to traditional education prevailed.
- 15 Congressman Jorge Rodríguez, *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de diputados de La Nación*, Aug., 26 and 27, 1992, p.2206.
- 16 Congresswoman Angela Sureda (UCR), *Ibid.*p.2211.
- 17 Congressman Carlos Raimundi (UCR), *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de diputados de la Nación*, April, 14, 1993, p. 2325.
- 18 Congressman Luis Zamora (Izquierda Unida (IU), *Ibid.* p.6764-65.
- 19Congressman Angel Elías (UCR) *Ibid.*, 1992, pp.2308-09 and *Ibid.*, 1993, p.6772.
- 20 Senator Jorge Cendoya (UCR), *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de senadores de La Nación*, December,16-17, 1992, pp.4241-42..
- 21 Conurbation of Buenos Aires, also called AMBA, Metropolitan area of Great Buenos Aires, is compounded by the districts located around the Capital of the country. Its population represents 25% of the total of the country and 70% of the Province of Buenos Aires. More than 50% of its population are under the poverty line.
- 22 María Fernanda Arias, “La Ley Federal de Educación en la Argentina: su aplicación en la provincia de Buenos Aires”, *Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*. Vol.13, No.8, January, 2005.
- 23 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Decisión Administrativa 20/2002*.
- 24 Juan Cruz Perusia, *Evolución de los resultados de los operativos de evaluación de la calidad educativa (1995-1999). Puntuaciones equiparadas de las pruebas de lengua y matemática*, Documento no.3. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 2004.
- 25 World Bank, *Staff Appraisal Report, Argentina, Higher Education Reform Project*, (Washington,1995).
- 26 Decree No. 2330/93
- 27 Roberto Rodríguez Gómez and Armando Alcántara, “Multilateral agencies and higher education in Latin America”, *Journal of Education Policy*, vol.16 no.6, 2001.
- 28 Marcela Mollis, *Las universidades en América Latina* .pp.10 –11.
- 29 World Bank . *Staff appraisal....*
- 30 Senator Eduardo Vaca (PJ), *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de senadores de la Nación*, 1995, p.2941.

- 31 Senator José Genoud (UCR), *Ibid*, pp. 2957-67.
- 32 Senator Jorge Cendoya (UCR), *Ibid*. p. 2891.
- 33 Message of the President. *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de diputados de La Nación*, May 23, 1995 p.1014.
- 34 Senator Eduardo Menem (PJ) *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de senadores de La Nación*. July 20, 1995, p.2887.
- 35 Senator José Bordón (FREPASO) *Ibid*. p.2907.
- 36 Congressman Aldo Rico (MODIN), *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de diputados de La Nación*, June, 7, 1995, pp. 1142-43.
- 37 Senator Jorge Cendoya (UCR), *Ibid*, pp.2889, 2893 and 2908.
- 38 Senator José Bordón (FREPASO), *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de senadores de La Nación*, July, 20, 1995 p.2899.
- 39 Congressman Galván (UCR) *Diario de sesiones de la cámara de diputados de La Nación*, June, 20,1995, p.1136.
- 40 Congressman Osvaldo Pellin (Movimiento Popular Neuquino (MPN), *Ibid*. , pp.1145-48.
- 41 Congressmen Osvaldo Pellin (MPN) and Fernando Solanas (Frente Amplio), *Ibid*. , p.1151.
- 42 However limited, the project of congresswoman from Tucumán, Olijuela del Valle Rivas (PJ) made a profile of a new graduate more related to his position in the context of Latin America integration in Mercosur.
- 43 Current Minister of Education, Daniel Filmus, expressed his worry about the diminishing entrance of candidates for engineering courses by setting out scholarships programs (see *Diario La Nación*, March, 10, 2005)

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