



Reform University of Córdoba: Impacts in Latin America and Lessons for the Present Time

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ABSTRACT

Celebrating the centennial of the University Reform that took place in Cordoba, Argentina, in 2018, we bring to the debate the importance of studying this experience of rebellion against the university hierarchy, while also highlighting its relevance, especially with regard to the need for democratization of the university and its connection to the working class and popular sectors. We aim to contribute to this experience being known by the vast majority of students in Brazil, also indicating its relevance to (re) construct a new student movement in an emancipatory perspective. For this, we carried out a historical-bibliographic review of what it proposed and what the reform meant in terms of autonomy and democratization, and which marked the birth of a new Latin American generation, causing subsequent agitation in other countries of the subcontinent. We emphasize that this experience evidences the active role of the student movement as a social actor in promoting social changes guided by an orientation inherent in the class struggle and in the concreteness of constructing a project that envisages a new hegemony in society. As conclusions, we highlight the relevance of the struggle for democratization and the objective of linking the university to the problems of society, fertile ground for the development of an emancipatory and popular education.

KEYWORDS

Education. Student movement. Emancipation. Democracy. Latin America.

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Reforma Universitária de Córdoba: Impactos na América Latina e Lições para o Tempo Presente

RESUMO

Ao celebrar o centenário da Reforma Universitária que aconteceu em 1918 em Córdoba, na Argentina, trazemos ao debate a importância de estudar essa experiência de rebelião contra a hierarquia universitária, ao passo que destacamos também sua atualidade, principalmente no que diz respeito à necessidade de democratização da universidade e sua vinculação a classe trabalhadora e setores populares. Objetivamos contribuir para que essa experiência seja conhecida pela ampla maioria dos estudantes no Brasil, indicando também sua relevância para (re)construir um novo movimento estudantil numa perspectiva emancipadora. Para isso, realizamos uma revisão histórico-bibliográfica sobre o que propunha e o que significou a referida reforma em termos de autonomia e democratização, e que assinalou o nascimento de uma nova geração latino-americana, provocando agitações posteriores em outros países do subcontinente. Ressaltamos que essa experiência evidencia o papel ativo do movimento estudantil enquanto ator social na promoção de mudanças sociais pautadas por uma orientação inerente à luta de classes e na concretude da construção de um projeto que vislumbra uma nova hegemonia na sociedade. Como conclusões, destacamos a atualidade da luta pela democratização e o objetivo de vincular a universidade aos problemas da sociedade, terreno fértil para o desenvolvimento de uma educação emancipadora e popular.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Educação. Movimento estudantil. Emancipação. Democracia. América Latina.

Reforma Universitaria de Córdoba: Impactos em América Latina y Lecciones para el Tiempo Presente

RESUMEN

Al celebrar el centenario de la Reforma Universitaria que tuvo lugar en 1918 en Córdoba, Argentina, traemos al debate la importancia de estudiar esa experiencia de rebelión contra la jerarquía universitaria, mientras que destacamos también su actualidad, principalmente en lo que se refiere a la necesidad de democratización de la universidad y su vinculación a la clase obrera y sectores populares. Objetivamos contribuir a que esa experiencia sea conocida por la amplia mayoría de los estudiantes en Brasil, indicando también su relevancia para (re) construir un nuevo movimiento estudiantil en una perspectiva emancipadora. Para ello, realizamos una revisión histórico-bibliográfica sobre lo que proponía y lo que significó dicha reforma en términos de autonomía y democratización, y que señaló el nacimiento de una nueva generación latinoamericana, provocando agitaciones posteriores en otros países del subcontinente. Resaltamos que esta experiencia evidencia el papel activo del movimiento estudiantil como actor social en la promoción de cambios sociales pautados por una orientación inherente a la lucha de clases y en la concreción de la construcción de un proyecto que vislumbra una nueva hegemonía en la sociedad. Como conclusiones, destacamos la actualidad de la lucha por la democratización y el objetivo de vincular a la universidad a los problemas de la sociedad, terreno fértil para el desarrollo de una educación emancipadora y popular.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación. Movimiento estudiantil. Emancipación. Democracia. América Latina.

Introduction and Historical-Methodological Aspects

In 2018 is celebrated the centennial anniversary of the University Reform happened in Córdoba, Argentina, an important political fact carried out by the university youth, a deeply subversive movement that was the expression of a set of economic and social contradictions that lived in Latin America as a and that in Argentina in particular, with the students, achieved a different response. It was a moment where political advances were made in debates and actions on autonomy, co-government and democratization of universities, when youth rebelled against the university hierarchy, marking the birth of the new Latin American generation, causing subsequent agitation in other countries of the subcontinent in their respective universities.

Starting from a Marxist point of view, we carried out a class analysis of the content of this movement within the framework of the Argentine economic and social formation of the period, in a context marked by wars and revolutions in the world. To draw this background, we highlight three relevant political facts with international impact that allow us to problematize the possibility of the rebellion carried out by youth and the working class: the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the First World War in 1914 and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

It was not a movement restricted to the university, based on the ideology and revolutionary inspiration of the Russian Revolution, which was fused in the previous year in 1917, the general strike initiated by the students of the Argentine city of Cordoba against the university aristocracy contained fundamentally the participation of the students in the government of the universities, the insertion of the Latin American peoples and their history in the same, and the modernization of the university system, where the faculty or student did not have representation, did not was renewed and lacked the freedom of professorship. These are struggles that, however, are perceived to remain current.

From the full knowledge of the local and regional reality, to build from a dialectical link a philosophy capable of offering itself as an intellectual weapon to the proletariat. We are talking about a reform that pervades the scope of philosophy because it is precisely in these middle classes that the connection with their role in history is found. As Marx argued in Hegel's "Critique of the Philosophy of Right," philosophy would find in the proletariat its material weapons, while the proletariat would find in philosophy its intellectual weapons. (MARX, 2005, p. 156).

Even though it has a strong Latin American impact, in Brazil it is a little known political phenomenon, possibly because we have a historical debt with free public education as a right. We aim, with this work, to contribute to its necessary propagation, as a political school relevant to (re) constructing a new student movement in an emancipatory perspective. We emphasize that this experience evidences the active role of the student movement as a

social actor in promoting social change guided by an orientation inherent in the class struggle and in the concreteness of a project of a new hegemony in society.

We will emphasize some of the important repercussions that this reform has had on Latin America, mainly in the countries of Chile, Mexico, Peru and Cuba, emphasizing the analysis of popular university projects headed by important intellectuals and activists, who were Peruvians José Carlos Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre and the Cuban Julio Antonio Mella, young intellectuals and militants that participated in the student movement of their countries at the time and that are remarkable names in the political history Marxist of the subcontinent. As inferential cases, we will also discuss the influence of the University Reform in Córdoba on pedagogical and humanizing conceptions such as the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda.

These concrete experiences of self-organization with the protagonism of student social movements remerged the importance of a hundred years later, to reaffirm our commitment to the construction of a free democratic public university and at the service of the working class and the popular sectors.

Latin American Anti-Imperialism and the University Reform of Cordoba

Before entering into the theme of University Reform, it is necessary to emphasize some crucial historical events, both internal and external to Latin America, which, even if they do not establish direct relations among themselves, have contributed to promote, in a different way, some fissures in the " liberal-oligarchic hegemony that characterized the societies of the subcontinent since the end of the previous century " (KAYSEL, 2014, p. 4). First, the Mexican Revolution, of 1910 and extends in its ascending period until 1920, the first peasant rebellion of the region; the 1st World War, from 1914 to 1918, whose event decisively influenced world politics and economy, and finally the Russian Revolution of 1917, where for the first time the proletariat took power.

According to André Kaysel, these events would have a decisive influence on the "rupture of the middle class intellectuals with the ideological establishment of the University Reform oligarchies", either because it breaks with the idea of a Europe without the barbarism that means a war, or because demonstrates the possibilities of the taking of power by the working class, or demonstrate that Latin America could also be a stage for revolutions and a struggle for land (KAYSEL, 2014, p. 5).

In Argentina, from the structural point of view, the great landowners, as a modern social class that benefits from the differential income of land in the capitalist world market, loses political space with the political reform that in the country meant the Saenz Peña Law of 1912. This change in the electoral law allowed the arrival in 1916 of President Hipólito Yrigoyen, member of the Radical Civic Union (UCR).

It is necessary to remember that regardless of this political change in the political sphere, the Church continues to have very strong political weight, fundamentally in universities, in the educational field. In 1918, in Argentina, there were five universities, Buenos Aires, La Plata, Santa Fé, Tucumán and Córdoba, and precisely in the latter, founded in 1613, it was strongly clerical, expressing Córdoba a set of tensions of the world political situation. For example, subordination to the great powers was discarded, both by the middle classes, and by a group of intellectuals who had weight and influence in the student movement, both in Argentina itself and in other countries of America. José Ingenieros, also in Argentina, Raúl Haya de la Torre and José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru, Juan Antonio Mella in Cuba and José Vasconcelos in Mexico are important exponents of this type of intellectual.

There was a strong anti-imperialist sentiment in the middle and youth classes expressed by some of these intellectuals. Haya de la Torre and Mariátegui specifically discuss the debate on anti-imperialism and socialism in the first phase of the reception of Marxism in Latin America in the first decades of the nineteenth century (LÖWY, 2006).

Haya de la Torre is concerned to combat imperialism independently of Marxism and try to overcome it, from a rather narrow view of Marxism which concludes that it would be a Europeanized ideology according to which all peoples have to go through the same stages of development in order to conclude the dictatorship of the proletariat, as well as understanding that the phenomenon of imperialism would be an option for government and not a higher stage of capitalism, in a Leninist sense of the term. Mariátegui, meanwhile, understands that when anti-imperialist or anticolonialist struggles do not advance towards socialism they end up joining imperialism, precisely because it seeks to ally the subordinate sectors with some bourgeois fraction, did not attribute to any Latin American national bourgeoisie the task of revolution of any kind, bourgeois or nationalist (MARIÁTEGUI, 2011). The two Peruvian intellectuals were forged in the struggles of the student movement.

Argentina, a semicolonial country as in the rest of Latin America, did not exist a bourgeoisie that fulfilled the historical tasks of the bourgeoisie, and the labor movement, even with a certain force, was not yet an established political actor, for two reasons. The first was because it was composed of a large mass of immigrants who did not even have political rights, and the second, because its ideology was still divided into a reformist Socialist Party (PS), in the footsteps of French socialist Jean Jaurés and anti-political ideologies. anarchism or revolutionary syndicalism of Sorelian character.¹

Leon Trotsky affirms that when the bourgeoisie does not solve the problems of bourgeois society and the proletariat still can't take on this task, it is the students who occupy the political scene. Precisely the University Reform expresses the contradiction between the advance of science, more flexible political regimes and certain social advances, with the decadence of "houses of high studies". There was a contradiction between science and

¹ In reference to George Sorel, French trade-unionist who greatly influenced revolutionary syndicalism currents, which were incorporated in part to the Latin American populism.

religion, and Charles Darwin was not accepted in the universities, and subjects of medieval character were retained as "Right to the servants." These contradictions are not only local, they also present in an unequal and combined way in each country.

On the subject, the Liminar Manifesto, main political document of the University Reform of Cordoba is clear:

Universities have thus become the true reflection of these decadent societies striving to offer the sad spectacle of senile immobility. That is why Science, in front of these silent and closed houses, passes silently or is mutilated and grotesque to the bureaucratic service (MANIFESTO LIMINAR, 2018, s/n).

In the wake of this reflection, we differentiate three stages in the University Reform movement, which express different advances in the consciousness of the student movement. The first stage begins at the end of 1917, where the students perform a below signed to the Ministry of Public Instruction demanding a democratization of the system of chairs, the freedom of professorship. The demands are not satisfied and in 1918 the movement emerges with more force, grassroots assemblies, street demonstrations and a very relevant organizational form arises which will be the creation of the Pro-Reform Committee on March 10, 1918, from where later the University Federation of Córdoba (FUC) will be created. This committee declares the general strike until the demands are met by the corresponding authorities and has a massive attitude on the part of the students who do not begin the classes on the first of April of 1918.

The strike is aimed at the intervention of the government, something that President Hipólito Yrigoyen realizes, since the students form part of its social base, being named Jose Matienzo like intervenor. With the intervention, the first stage of the movement is closed, a first reform of the statute was carried out that allowed to broaden the teaching base that intervened in the elections of the university authorities. Students understand that if younger professors came in with a liberal ideology, there was the possibility of choosing non-Catholic university authorities at different levels, in the perspective that unprivileged teachers would be allies. They relied on the institutionality that emerged from this reform of the statute, yet they would disappoint with little time.

Precisely the second part of the struggle process takes place on June 15, 1918, when the University Assembly meets to choose the new rector. While the students defended a liberal, Enrique Martínez Paz, Antonio Nores, candidate of the teachers' oligarchs, was elected, even liberal professors who voted for the conservative and clerical candidate, which generated a student rupture with a fraction of the teachers.

As a feature of this stage, direct action, student violence, breaking of windows and furniture to impede the university assembly, confrontations with the police and the raising of demands by the students, drafting of a bill by the party the Congress of students, which included tripartite and parity government and free teaching, freedom of teaching.

The strike begins in Cordoba, but soon becomes nationalized, and the highest point of this period is the publication of the Manifesto of the University Reform of Cordoba, written by Deodoro Roca and published on June 21, 1918, which we mention elsewhere of the article, which is where the ideological elements of the University Reform appear. We have as characteristics Americanism, internationalism, and it is fundamental to point out that the youth of Córdoba addresses the free men of South America, appearing as a romantic declaration for the independence of the Latin American states. This is expressed from the title: "Manifesto of the University Reform. The Argentine youth of Cordoba to the free men of South America" (MANIFESTO LIMINAR, 1918).

Another relevant feature of this stage is the adherence to the struggle of the Federation of Workers of Córdoba (FOC), the highest local trade union center, a central fact. One of the limits of the movement is that they believed in independence as a national question, without taking into account the character of the Latin American bourgeoisie, disregard that the bourgeoisie themselves are a hindrance to this independence and that this task is in the hands of the working class.

The third step is the students' attempt to turn the game in favour of the students, changing the methodology of action. Students take the university and place it under their control, appoint professors, representatives, employees, organize curriculum activities and exams. The period is closed with the victory of reformists intervening once again the Ministry of Education, which changes the statutes of the university and until 1921 were changed of all the universities.

The *Liminar* Manifest has an internationalist character, which is expressed in the affirmation that there is an American hour and the subsequent impact in Latin America.

The University Reform of Cordoba and the Popular Universities: impacts on Latin America

At the regional level, the reform expresses the struggle of youth against the old order. The University Reform, a true student rebellion, had a strong impact in Latin America, centrally in Peru and Cuba, countries that echoed more strongly the lessons of Córdoba, managing to establish projects of popular universities.

The role played by young intellectuals and militants, such as Haya de La Torre and José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru, and Júlio Antonio Mella in Cuba, through the student federations in which they were engaged is fundamental to understand how the approximation of these with society and students in general. It should be remembered that these events are part of a political moment in the subcontinent where violent dictatorships such as that of Augusto Leguía in Peru, which lasted from 1919 to 1923, and of Gerardo Machado in Cuba, 1923 to 1933. Haya de la Torre and Júlio Mella lead the creation of popular universities, in a context of resistance to these governments, with the organized youth and begin their political

careers as student leaders where, from this position, they were projected in the scene national policy.

Haya de la Torre, then president of the Peruvian Student Federation (FEP), created in Peru the Popular Universities of Gonzalez Prada (hereafter UPGP), which take this name as recognition to this Peruvian writer who died in 1918, who, emancipated from all academicism, created new literary forms and modern ideological currents. According to the Peruvian historian Alberto Flores Galindo, this project seeks confluences between intellectuals and workers, free of any academicist temptation (FLORES GALINDO, 1991). There are four popular universities in the country: San Marcos University in Lima, San Augustin University in Arequipa, La Libertad University in Trujillo and San Antonio Abad University in Cusco.

In the 1920s there was the first congress of students from Peru, where the FEP was formally created in Lima, allied with the other universities. The project of the popular universities Gonzalez Prada presents as a novelty is the way to articulate a structural relationship between the university movement and the labour movement, functioning as a self-financed university extension tool that should be directed to the people to take them access to science and helps them to form an awareness of their social situation and the national problematic, also knowing what is happening in the world. From this first epoch where a link of fronts of struggle (until then worker and student) emerges a kind of united front of manual and intellectual workers (HAYA DE LA TORRE, 1985). The UPGP seeks the renewal of the academic structures that until then were archaic, always hegemonized by a self-appointed aristocracy, and who held chairs. The university movement was effectively linked to workers mainly to the urban labour movement.

Coming back from a political exile in Europe², José Carlos Mariátegui readily accepted the invitation of Haya de la Torre to teach at the UPGP in Lima, as a way of sharing his European experience, especially in relation to the world situation he had been following in his stay in Italy, during an important period for the revolutionary struggle. He was able to witness the legacy of Turin's councils and factory occupations, the Biennium Rosso (between 1919 and 1920), the founding of the Communist Party of Italy in 1921, the rise of fascism, and the debates within the Third International. Becomes a reader of the young Gramsci, who was organizing the press of the Communist Party of Italy (AGUIAR, 2017).

² His involvement with the Peruvian student movement, his militancy - still incipient - and the consequent opposition to President Leguía gave him the closing of the newspaper where he worked at the time, *La Razón*, and an "exile" in Europe, where he lived during the years from 1919 to 1923, having spent most of his time in Italy, where he married and had two children. He lived as a sort of "government propaganda agent abroad", an alternative that was given him not to be arrested on Peruvian soil. He later affirmed that only during his stay in Europe, more precisely through his experience of living for several years in Italy and through the passage to other countries where he experienced the experiences of the workers' movement in trade union and party organizations and the impacts of the Russian Revolution, was able to understand capitalist relations in semi-colonial countries such as Peru.

Mariátegui participated in the UPGP project mainly in the years 1923 and 1924, which consisted of a kind of studies in the communities organized collectively to carry out courses of political formation, of conjunctural analysis, since the critical spaces are blocked in the spaces of access to formal instruction. There was a struggle for renewal of the previously archaic academic structures, which had always been hegemonized by an aristocracy that indicated itself to be self-professed, and who were chairmen. Knowing of the struggles and the Latin American student movement, he indicated in several of his works the need to attack "oligarchic teaching" and "arbitrary completion of professorships", as well as the importance of student intervention towards universities in favour of the establishment of chairs and free assistance. It emphasizes, therefore, the importance of these "dialectical claims", starting from the real and concrete lessons of the student action aligned to a movement of vanguard and formation of vanguard workers (MARIÁTEGUI, 2008, p. 137-138).

As intellectual and militant, Mariátegui points out that a great historical initiative, as a mission of the proletariat, is only possible if, through a "long and arduous educational work of its vanguards", the dissolving elements are surpassed and the immediate demands, such as some embargoes of the student revolution of Cordova, like the lack of direction and autonomy were given.

Another project of Popular Universities focused on the working class is being developed in Cuba under the name of Popular Universities "José Martí", a great Latin American anti-imperialist leader, directed by Julio Mella. The particularity of Mella, founder of the Cuban Communist Party, a member of a party not yet stalinized, was to draw a socialist conclusion from the University Reform. If for all reformers the social question is present, in what later became known as the policies of university extension, for Mella, and it was necessary to go beyond the questioning of university institutionality and to link the university with the working class within the framework of a revolutionary strategy. The objective of the José Martí Popular University is to form a working class with a new, cultured and revolutionary mentality.

As stated by Nestor Kohan (2000: 81), the Statutes of José Martí University present the "spirit" of Julio Mella, in his first article:

The Cuban proletarian class founded, professed and directed the José Martí Popular University, recognizing the rights of the Professor of the University of Havana to deny or discuss the students (own translation)

The critique of the hierarchical and undemocratic university aims to connect the university to the social problems of the working class. Because of the achievements of the Cordoba Reform, there are still university extension policies. This demand was expressed in the students' support for the relevant general strike of 1919, known as "The Tragic Week" through the Federation of Santa Fe and Cordoba. Even though it is a minority of the student movement that actively participates in this support, it is a qualitatively important support. Both in Peru and in Cuba they propose to produce knowledge in the service of the working class. The Popular University of Gonzalez Prada in Peru aims to intervene in workers'

conflicts under the "social justice" basis and José Martí in Cuba seeks to form a working class with a new and revolutionary cultured mentality.

At a time when the political left in general feels that it should refuse to raise the consciousness of the working class by adapting to the dominant ideology, Mariátegui and Mella's goal was also that of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci: to raise the consciousness of the working class without lowering the program at the level of common sense. On the subject, the *Liminar Manifest* (1918, s / n) concludes:

Youth don't ask for more. It demands to be recognized the right to externalize this own thought in the university bodies through its representatives. You're tired of supporting tyrants. If you were able to make a revolution in your consciousness, you cannot ignore the ability to intervene in the government of your own university. The University of Cordoba, through its Federation, greets the comrades throughout America and encourages collaboration in the work of freedom that begins.

It should also be pointed out that the Córdoba Reform inaugurates a new way of thinking about education and society, on the horizon of a social transformation. It opens the possibility for the public university to effectively carry out a social mission. With the creation of the Popular Universities, a new form of knowledge exchange was inaugurated, where university walls no longer determined where classes, seminars, public debates on the local and world situation should take place. These precepts are envisioned decades later until today, were passed on by the student social movements, which always played an important role of resistance in periods when there were regimes of exception and curtailment of democratic freedoms, as in dictatorships. Practices inherited still in the dialogical knowledge driven by Paulo Freire, in the research action participation inaugurated by Orlando Fals Borda, authors who point out that it can't be possible to separate "subjectivity from objectivity; the creator of the creature; the educator, of education; the individual, of society "and who start from a critical pedagogy designed for the peripheries and the global south (MOTA NETO, 2018, p. 47).

Conclusions: Current Relevance of the Lessons of Cordoba for Public Education and the Contemporary Student Movement

Universities, like so many institutions of the present regime, are made to sustain and aid the mastery of the ruling class. To believe that intellectuals, or educational institutions, have no connection with the sociological division into classes of every society is a strategic mistake. Never has a class supported an institution, much less educational institutions, if it isn't for their benefit. It is in universities, in all educational institutions, where the culture of the ruling class is forged, where its servants leave the vast field of science it monopolizes.

In relation to the validity and relevance of the University Reform, it is central to discuss the need to change the university structure. A group of teachers still has privileges, so it is necessary to democratize the university, which does not work in terms of even French Revolution, with parity of votes, much like an *Ancien Regime*, in an aristocratic way. The

objective of linking the university to the problems of society is also relevant and current, opening the doors of the university to the people and the working class. The critique of fragmented knowledge of reality in the face of the postmodernism of the universities is also current, to which we must oppose a scientific and totality view.

In short, it is necessary to build a new student movement that takes as experience the University Reform of 1918, but that like the French May of 1968 or in the Cordobazo of 1969 in Argentina, is linked to the working class, and besides criticizing the university structure, to criticize class society from an autonomous perspective of the bosses, governments, state and rectors, in order to think of a free public university at the service of the working class and the popular sectors.

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