



**THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE UNIVERSITIES:
THE SOUTH AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**

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1.- Introduction.-

To understand the relationship of the South American Universities with the social movements within the Region it is essential to analyze the origin and development of the Colonial University and its transition to the University after Independence. It is also assential to explain how the universities evolved within the new countries and how the national political and social developments interacted with the external political influences.

Furthermore, it is important to explain why the proposed academic reforms have not been successful and why it is that the dedication to scientific research within the universities has not developed equally in all of the South American countries. It will be shown that the impact of the South American universities on social movements has been very limited and sporadic.

2.- The Colonial University.-

The Latin-American University was shaped following the model of the University of Salamanca. This means that the universities included the Faculties of Theology, Law and Medicine with no dedication to the cultivation of Science since human thought developed under the influence of Aristotelian and Thomist philosophy. It is estimated that the South-American universities awarded degrees to about 100 thousand students before 1820¹. Some of these graduates inspired the independence movements.

University life in Latin America was regulated by decrees of King Fernando III and King Alfonso X. The seven commandments of Alfonso "The Wise" which were the code of higher education and the first University Statute were applied both to the universities of Spain and to those of Colonial Latin America. The university reform of King Charles III modified the Statute in the mid-Eighteenth Century. Before the advent of the independence movements there were twenty-five universities in Latin America and of these sixteen were founded in South America. All of these were created because of the initiative of the religious congregations conscious of the fact that the Latin-American youth could not carry out their higher education in Spain.²

The Colonial University was opened primarily for the Spaniards or citizens of Spanish origin who were trained to become public servants and political leaders and to constitute the social elite. Very few natives were accepted as university students.

The graduates of the Colonial University owned the land and together organized a very strong oligarchy.³ The natives were used on the farms as instruments of hard labor with no rights since they were considered inferior. The social consequence was that a strong feudal society had the power to impose its will on all human activities with the negative result that up to the beginning of this Century this social structure prevailed in all of the South American countries.

The French Revolution had a strong influence on the last stage of the Colonial University. Two consequences were derived from this intellectual heredity: The devotion to university autonomy and a great enthusiasm to prepare professionals and political leaders.

TABLE 1.- THE UNIVERSITIES OF LATIN AMERICA (1538-1815)

Denomination	Inauguration
Santo Tomas de Santo Domingo	1538
Santiago de La Paz, Santo Domingo	1540
Mexico, Mexico	1551
San Marcos, Lima, Peru	1551
Santo Tomas, Bogota, Colombia	1580
San Fulgencio, Quito, Ecuador	1586
Cordova, Argentine	1613
San Gregorio, Quito, Ecuador	1620
Santiago de Chile	1621
Jesuit Javerian, Bogota, Colombia	1622
San Javier, Chacras, Argentine	1622
San Ignacio, Cuzco, Peru	1622
Merida, Yucatan, Mexico	1624
Huamanga, Muamanga, Peru	1685
San Fernando, Quito, Ecuador	1688
Santo Tomas de Aquino, Quito, Ecuador	1690
Guatemala, Guatemala	1692
Segunda del Cuzco, Peru	1692
San Jeronimo, Habana, Cuba	1721
San Felipe, Santiago, Chile	1738
Panama, Panama	1750
San Carlos, Cordova, Argentine	1800
Merida, Venezuela	1807
Nicaragua, Leon, Nicaragua	1815

The pioneer leaders for independence from Spain were graduates of the Colonial University of 1780 to 1820 who were familiar with the ideological content of the French Revolution. It is strange to realize that the American Revolution had no impact on the intellectual development of the Colonial Universities of Latin America.⁴

The Renaissance which sprang up in Europe in the Thirteenth Century and extended into the Seventeenth Century had no effect on the cultural developments within the South American University. Intellectual thought was under the direct influence of Aristotelian philosophy and the power of the Catholic Church.

3.- The University After Independence.-

(a) Period 1800-1900

The independence from Spain of most of the South American countries took place between 1810 and 1830 and thus, new universities were organized to replace those of the Colonial Period.

The model for the universities founded in South America after independence was the Napoleonic University which was an autarchical conglomerate of schools. Its main purpose in France was that of centralizing the educational system to unify the Republic culturally and politically.

The University of the Independence Period inherited the negative contents of the Napoleonic University, that is, to create independent schools which were organized with the purpose of training professionals within an anticlerical medium with emphasis on the positivist doctrine towards the new systems of law which in the end served to strengthen the oligarchic pact between landowners, the Government and the Church.⁵

The South American University of the Independence Period did not assimilate much of the French model since it was designed to offer education to the sons of the landowners, the merchants and the government officials who were trained to maintain the social order and to exercise the highly prestigious liberal professions closely knitted to the social and political system.

Agricultural and industrial production was carried out by illiterate workers who had acquired a primitive knowledge transmitted to them orally. Whenever new techniques were introduced, foreign technicians usually sent by the exporting enterprises were hired to install the new equipment and machinery.

The maintenance of the new installations was then under the care of national citizens specifically trained at the level of operators. The need for professionals to manage the new factories is the origin of the foundation of the faculties of engineering beginning in 1900.

The Napoleonic model which was used as the basis for the creation of new autarchical schools was misused since the apparent modernization served to bring together the schools into faculties. Thus, the new universities were really federations of faculties which offered professional training with no dedication at all to the task of carrying out scientific research. The new university was an abstraction which as an institution confined its activities to formal academic ceremonies.

The university students within this organization did not share the new academic experiences since the contact among them was only through the student associations.

It is often proclaimed that the University is ideally an organized community of professors and students. The reality is that the professors of one faculty do not know their colleagues of the others and that the relations

among the students are likewise very limited. The contacts among the professors are often episodic, once their duties within the university are reduced to a few hours per week lecturing to students who listen and take notes passively.

(b) Period 1900-1940.-

The Latin American University of this Century has been opened to structural changes due both to internal and external factors. The first was due to the efforts of introducing institutional renovation by dissatisfied professors and the desire of change promoted by the student bodies.⁶ The second was due to external influences which resulted in the inauguration of new schools, the modernization of the courses offered by the schools and faculties and the strong political interferences within the universities.

The structural changes were not applied systematically since they were not the product of careful planning but rather the consequence of occasional movements and the political interventions within the universities.

There have been movements of reform which had a significant impact on university life. It is important to examine these reforms because of the achievements obtained as well as the failures which affected the development of the universities very significantly.

(1) The Reform of Cordova.- The declaration of Cordova of 1918 identified itself with the historical moment within the social and political context of Latin American life. The intellectuals started to feel their responsibility for the stagnation in relation to the progress of other nations and recognized the social obligations of the University toward the peoples.⁷

The distinctive characteristic of the Latin American University which

was imprinted by the Cordova Reform is the participation of the students in the governing organisms of the universities with the right to voice and vote. This new system became part of the university administration in Argentine, Uruguay, Bolivia and Peru and later, it was accepted in all of the Latin American countries.

The basic decalogue of the Reform of Cordova⁸ is:

- 1.- The participation of the students in the administration of the university.
- 2.- The autonomy of the university: academic and administrative.
- 3.- The election of university authorities: rector, vicerrectors, faculty deans and school directors by assemblies which include professors, students and graduates from the universities.
- 4.- The appointment of professors by public competition.
- 5.- Tenure for the professors limited to five years renewable only on the basis of efficiency and high academic standing.
- 6.- The gratuity of the higher education.
- 7.- The acceptance by the university of political and social responsibilities in relation to the country and the defense of democracy.
- 8.- Academic freedom.
- 9.- The organization and teaching of free courses parallel to those taught by the regular teaching staff and
- 10.- Voluntary attendance by students to classes.

This decalogue has been used as the source of inspiration by the South American students in their endeavors to promote the improvement of the academic level.

The Reform of Cordova was the basis of the doctrine of co-government which is considered by a segment of university professors to be the cause of degradation of the Institution, whereas other groups of professors think that

it is a source of progress. Marxist sociologists think that these two ways of evaluating co-government are identified with a reactionary and a progressive view of the University.

It is true that the participation of the students in the election of university authorities does often lead to corruption due to the immoral attitudes of politicized professors, but the student participation in the governing organisms free from political interference is often positive because they become sensitive to the academic deficiencies; they develop a preoccupation for the national problems and acquire a sense of responsibility for the social obligations of the University.

The Reform of Cordova had a decisive impact on the social and political thought within the universities, but the political interference in the student organizations deformed the purposes of this Reform. Moreover, the lack of obligation by the students to attend classes contributed to weaken the academic level of the Faculties of Science and Engineering.

(2) The Impact of Marxism on University Life.- The wealthy minorities with their dominating political power were strengthened by the alliances with the Military and the tacit support of the Catholic Church. The poor and illiterate majorities of the population fell under the leadership of the new Left (1920-) headed by Socialist and Communist leaders who offered solutions to their social and economic problems.

The strategy of the Marxist groups was to take over the universities for they thought that the revolutions could be programmed with the active participation of the intellectuals taking as a basis the Reform of Cordova. The result was disastrous because of the direct involvement of the universities in partisan politics. The credo was to combat yanqui imperialism, to insti-

tutionalize the co-government with student and administrative employees' participation, free admission to the institutions of higher learning, and so forth.

The military dictatorships which took over power on various occasions in all of the South American countries with the purpose of maintaining the existing social and economic status contributed paradoxically to strengthen the Marxist movements to the extent that they gained substantial political power. The net result was that university life became very irregular because of the suspensions of classes, the clashes of students with the police forces during their continuous public manifestations and the vexation of professors who were not in agreement with the Marxist movement.⁹

The academic developments within the universities were upset to the extent of placing the studies on a secondary level. Thus, the advancement of knowledge and the capacity of the universities to contribute to the solution of the social and economic problems became very limited.

This environment was fertile for repression, closing of the universities by direct military interventions, imprisonment of university authorities, professors and students. This is the evidence of the lack of imagination and political responsibility of the governments to solve the acute social injustices and to correct their policies towards the universities.

The Marxist argument was of fighting for the democratization of the University by means of gratuity and free admission. This is a policy which urgently requires a critical analysis since it is no solution to improving the training of professionals required by the South American countries to overcome both the social and economic underdevelopment.

The need to raise the academic level of science training was no part of

the Reform of Cordova nor of the Marxist intervention within the universities, and thus this reform contributed to emphasize rhetorical teaching with the result that the professionals graduated within this environment are verbose speakers in general, with only a superficial knowledge of the social and economic problems of their countries.

The inauguration of the new Faculties of Sciences and Engineering contributed to the split of the professors of these disciplines from the professors of the traditional subjects such as Law and Medicine, once the professors of the natural and exact sciences could not profit by selling their knowledge of Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry to a private clientele and thus, they depended on the salaries paid by the universities. The professors of the traditional subjects enjoyed enormous social prestige and had their income from their private practices.

(c) Period 1940 to the Present.-

The Institutes of Science and Technology were established in some of the South American universities late in the decade of the Forties following either the French or German model to satisfy the personal pride of distinguished professors rather than to create the environment to carry out organized scientific research.

the institutes confined within the professional faculties had no functionality with the result that the productivity was nil since the doors were practically closed to scientists of the new generation. Moreover, part-time dedication to the University was completely inadequate to satisfy the demand for good teaching and research work. It is new in the Latin American area to recognize that highly-trained scientists can carry out research effectively

only with full-time dedication.

The appointment of full-time professors led to a fierce competition among the influential professors to reach such a category since it meant a significant improvement of salaries. In most cases the result was that the appointments were not subject to a program of academic development but to political pressures. Within this environment, the coverage of some important fields of science was neglected and those professors who were trained to become research scientists had to dedicate their efforts to train professionals. Postgraduate education was thus detained till after the end of the Second World War.

(1) The Objectives of the New University.- There were other experiences of reform which ended in failure because they lacked originality. It was thought that the European experience could be transplanted intact to the South-American universities. The attempts at reform tried during and after the decade of the Thirties due to inconformity with the traditional university and the social and economic tensions developed by the economic crisis of 1929 did not change the situation although the great aspiration was that of accomplishing the following objectives:^{10,11}

1.- The creation of the conditions for the University to form groups of scientists and humanists of the highest level.

2.- The incorporation of scientific research as a basic function of the University.

3.- The creation of integrating units with the purpose of eliminating the dispersion of efforts, and

4.- The need to integrate the university into the national life as the

organism capable of generating the solutions to the national social, educational and political problems.

(2) The Reforms of the Universities in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.- It is worthwhile to examine the reform experiences of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

The Argentinian Reform.- This was based on an effort to achieve the integration of teaching subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, etc. common to various faculties in an intent to eliminate duplication of efforts. In the end the departmentalization of the Faculty of Exact Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires was achieved with the result that scientific research attained levels recognized internationally, but it could not grow further because of the conservative attitude of the deans of the classical faculties.

The military dictatorships intervened in the University with the result that distinguished professors were forced to leave the country. This meant the weakening of the organization of autonomous groups of scientific researchers in Argentina.

The Brazilian Reform.- Brazil organized its first university in 1925 in contrast to the experience of the other South American countries of having inherited the universities which were founded by the Spaniards during the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.

The University of the Federal District in Rio de Janeiro created in 1935 was identified by the dictatorship as too radical and thus it was closed in 1937. Later, the Faculties of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters were created in the Universities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro where distinguished professors brought mainly from France taught the basic sciences and trained scientific researchers.

The original project of the University of Sao Paulo was that of organizing courses of orientation for the secondary students entering the University before gaining admission to the faculties. It was also planned to select groups of students who would be directed to study basic sciences but the opposition of the classical Faculties of Law and Medicine was so strong that the reform could not be implemented.

The need to train teachers for the secondary level of education was recognized and thus, the new Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Letters was used as a model for the proliferation of such faculties to the extent of having 150 of them by 1980.

The Uruguayan Reform.- The Uruguayan solution proposed in 1945 was designed to offer courses of science and humanities with the basic purpose of forming scholars of the highest quality. The characteristic was that no degrees were conferred and the University was open to those citizens really interested in learning. The problem was that the men and women who went through such academic training had no future since they did not have any specific professional training.

(3) Scientific Research Becomes a Part of the University.- The need to overcome the stage of backwardness, the contacts of some university professors with their colleagues of the advanced countries and the university training of citizens of the South American nations in the universities of the advanced countries served as the basic factors for the introduction in the decade of 1940-1950 of scientific research as an essential academic activity within the universities of Argentina, Chile, Brazil and more recently of Venezuela. The development of science in the other South American countries is very modest because of the lack of highly trained scientists and financial support for

carrying out scientific research.^{12,13}

4.- The Impact of the Universities on Social Movements.-

It is important to recognize that any organized social system includes cultural and structural elements. In the case of the University the actions of the professors and students are regulated by a characteristic cultural universe. Within the universities, it is commonplace to respect knowledge in its different forms, to recognize the value of scientific research and to admire the intellectual work. These are the values which constitute collectively the cultural elements. But in addition there are other values which are considered valid by university professors and students. A good example is the observance of silence in the library. The other elements are the code of ethics which should regulate the professors' conduct and the spoken and written language used in the processes of education.

The cultural universe within the University covers an essential part of the academic life, but the social system includes also structural elements which are: the ways in which the academic activities are accomplished, the division of academic and research work, the organization of group activities, the ways the division of work and the social interactions take place (schools, faculties, institutes, administrative services, etc.), the hierarchies which regulate social contacts, the levels of cooperation and competition, etc.

The interactions between the cultural and structural elements are regulated by the location of the University. It makes a substantial difference whether the University is located in an advanced country or an underdeveloped one. In the latter, there are not the conditions to provide the structural elements at a level necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of the cultural elements.

To evaluate the impact of the University on the social attitudes and movements within South America is not at all difficult.

The fact that the universities were isolated from national life because of the lack of confidence from the governments as well as the economic enterprises curtailed very seriously the influence of the universities on the social movements within the South American countries. It was commonplace to label the university graduates as "Communists", a denomination that was meant to create an environment of mistrust and misunderstanding. With this background it is easy to realize that the impact of the University on the social development of the South American countries has been very modest.

The lack of opportunities of work for university graduates is indeed a source of preoccupation once they have to find work in areas different from those of their professions. There is great frustration among the excessive number of university graduates who are very sensitive to the social problems including the concentration of economic and political power in a few families.

A positive social and political attitude of the university students has been their defense of the stability of the democratic institutions when these have been upset by de facto governments. The students have also acted as guardians of popular interests which are subject to instability because of inflation and monetary devaluations. However, the problem is that no solutions are offered to solve the complex problems which confront the Region.

The reaction of some university graduates identified with the extreme right or left has been that of acting as the ideologists of subversion with the tragic political outcome lived in Uruguay, Brazil, Argentine and Peru where it appears that the subversive groups have as their central purpose the overthrow of the constitutional institutions by savage means.

The contribution of the universities to improve the standard of living of the peoples through scientific research has been insignificant because of the limited financial support offered to do research, the lack of continuity of effort due to student strikes and the fact that in most areas of scientific research the critical masses have not been attained.¹⁴

5.- Conclusions.-

The social structure inherited from Spain has not been eliminated completely with the result that the universities are characterized by a conservative attitude towards change.

At present, there is a generalized recognition of the fact that the university structure must be modified in order to contribute significantly to solve the complex social problems which confront the South American countries.

The universities of Argentine, Chile, Brazil and Venezuela have gone through processes of readjustments to include research as a fundamental activity developed to improve the agricultural and industrial productivity, the low levels of health, etc.

a positive attitude within the universities is that there is recognition of the need to improve their performance to meet the challenges of the forth-coming Twenty-First Century. The answer to this will depend on how the politicians react to find solutions to ensure an effective impact of the University on the social improvement of the way of life of the South American people.

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