



**The poor child at the beginning of the 20th century in São Paulo.
Reflections on the Sampaio Dória Reform¹**

A criança pobre do início do século XX em São Paulo.
Reflexões em torno da Reforma de Sampaio Dória

El niño pobre a principios del siglo XX en São Paulo.
Reflexiones acerca de la Reforma de Sampaio Dória

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Abstract

Notable aspects of Brazilian education at the beginning of the 20th century are debates regarding the universalization of schools and the state assuming direction of the first years of school to eradicate illiteracy, as well as discussions regarding a curriculum framework, given the need to develop civil society and the economy. The São Paulo Public Education Reform of 1920, under the direction of Antonio de Sampaio Dória, became an unquestionable milestone among regional reforms. In this study, we analyze the basic text of the Sampaio Dória Reform in reference to the stated intention of eradicating illiteracy, and we examine the history underlying the arguments used in its defense, especially with respect to adequate inclusion of children at the beginning of the 20th century, aiming at constituting a society capable of sustaining the civilizing foundations of progress through democratization of opportunities.

Keywords: Literacy Training; Reforms; Basic Education.

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Resumo

No que concerne à educação brasileira, o início do século XX é marcado tanto pelos debates referentes à universalização da escola e à assunção dos primeiros anos da escola pelo estado para erradicação do analfabetismo quanto pelas discussões sobre os fundamentos curriculares, dada a necessidade de se civilizar a sociedade e de fazer progredir a economia. A Reforma da Instrução Pública de São Paulo de 1920, sob o comando de Antonio de Sampaio Dória, tornou-se um marco incontestável entre as reformas regionais. Neste estudo, analisamos, no texto base da Reforma Sampaio Dória, o que se refere ao intuito proferido de erradicação do analfabetismo e verificamos o substrato histórico dos argumentos empregados em sua defesa, com respeito à adequada inserção da criança do início do século XX, tendo em vista a constituição de uma sociedade capaz de sustentar as bases civilizatórias do progresso através da democratização de oportunidades.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização; Reforma; Educação Básica.

Resumen

En lo que concierne a la educación brasileña, el inicio del siglo XX está marcado tanto por debates acerca de la universalización de las escuelas y la asunción de los primeros años de la escuela por parte del estado para erradicar el analfabetismo como por discusiones sobre las bases curriculares, dada la necesidad de civilizar la sociedad y hacer avanzar la economía. La Reforma de la Instrucción Pública de São Paulo de 1920, bajo el mando de Antonio de Sampaio Dória, se convirtió en un hito indiscutible entre las reformas regionales. En este estudio analizamos, en el texto base de la Reforma Sampaio Dória, lo que se refiere a la intención declarada de erradicar el analfabetismo y verificamos el sustrato histórico de los argumentos utilizados en su defensa, respecto a la adecuada inserción del niño a principios del siglo XX, considerando la constitución de una sociedad capaz de sustentar las bases civilizadoras del progreso a través de la democratización de las oportunidades.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización; Reforma; Educación Básica.

Introduction

The São Paulo Public Education Reform (*Reforma da Instrução Pública de São Paulo*) of 1920 was proposed with the aim of asserting the political agenda of a supposed modernizing government regarding public management. However, it became controversial as soon as its purposes began to be disclosed and throughout its implementation for its conservative approach in dealing with the effective pedagogical impacts on its recipients.

An understanding of children and their own identity in the course of human life is inextricably linked with the education one intends to provide them. Thus, on the one hand, there is what is imparted or what is thought to be known about children in terms of their basic needs, and on the other hand, the action projected toward this discursive entity – the child, to whom reference is made for the purpose of educating.

The discussion regarding the universalization of the first school grades under the aegis of the state inevitably portrays the discursive representation of the role of the state in social control and of the citizen in sharing power. This is clearly observed both in the reform proposed by Sampaio Dória in 1920 and in the conferences he gave to defend his positions.

The considerable emphasis given to the reform by the press shows how sensitive its proposals were to diverse sectors of society. Some inquired about the possibility of the unconstitutionality of some points, while others positively valued performance of the census, whose data were compiled to promote arguments that supported some topics of the text, with many even calling for census taking as a civic movement.

The actions carried out to publicize the census had a strong patriotic appeal, accompanying a discourse of education as salvation, in which illiteracy emerges as a *social pathology*, hence the idea of *combatting* it in order to *eradicate a disease*, with a mixture of warlike and medical language. Publications seek to strengthen precisely this image and highlight the magnitude of the problem. There is a concern to *make Brazilians more Brazilian* and nationalize immigrants, in which a national identity would be forged by the educated elite in order to confront the fragility that the large number of immigrants in São Paulo imposed on what it meant to be Brazilian. To defend public education was to ensure the unity of a sense of belonging that the nation so badly needed. The myth of the *bandeirante* is taken up once more, and São Paulo sees itself and is seen as a herald for the rest of the country. It is noteworthy that all of this is based on the idea of modernization, on the conception of a project for society with a promising future (MATHIELSON, 2017, p. 217).

Beyond the text that constitutes the reform and the debates surrounding it, there is also the physical presence of those who are in the gaps of the official addresses, submerged only in the day-to-day activities of producing wealth for others. These people continue to be deprived of a public platform, gnawing on grievances with hunger, and who were only revealed to the elite through the census.

Factory workers, immigrants, and blacks, the poor in the neighborhoods swept aside from urbanity or farmers, adults and children, those employed in coffee growing, exhausted in the sun, are not posed to speak in the heated clashes over children's education at the beginning of the 20th century.

The education built up at the blooming of Brazilian industrial capitalism

Industrial capitalism, consolidating scientism, migratory flows from the countryside to the city, and the production rationalism of industry, leads the Brazilian colonialist landscape at the end of the 19th century to a scenario of fierce dispute among the great powers for sources of raw materials, and for consumer markets at the beginning of the 20th century.

Brazil, in turn, reaches the peak of its coffee production, and a new agricultural export oligarchy is established to head the newly inaugurated Republic, though without resolving the social contradictions that add the intense concentration of capital and means of production [which includes ownership of large rural properties by the few favored by the Land Law of 1850 (Lei de Terras de 1850²)] to the precarious conditions offered in the direction of proletarianization of immigrants and freed slaves, both in the countryside and in the cities.

The accumulation of capital creates conditions for the coffee oligarchy to allocate resources in the incipient industrialization of São Paulo in the first twenty years of the 20th century. Therefore, the state of São Paulo and its capital are the synthesis of the contradictions that will accompany Brazil throughout the century, namely, urban demographic growth with the natural complexity of social relations that promotes the emergence of political forces originating from the proletariat and that is concomitant with and in opposition to the agri-industrial oligarchic forces and the agricultural export oligarchic forces.

Education became a privileged space for discussing the plans of these political subjects for the future of the country, through which intellectuals, especially doctors and lawyers, intended to establish scientific renewal. In contrast, church representatives professed to preserve traditional moral and political values.

Many of these values were shared by conservatives and progressives, and the effects of these values resulted in maintaining all the legal instruments capable of ensuring political power through which the State reinforced the asymmetry of forces, by means of which the oligarchies always enjoyed the advantages.

The scientific achievements obtained during the 19th century and the transformations of the bourgeois revolution offer support for instituting the desired civility through the establishment of an implicit relationship between the civilizing transformations and those arising from knowledge, science, and technology.

In cities in which the rate of population growth sharply increases, urban architecture undergoes a great transformation in a short period of time.

The city of São Paulo in 1900 already had an estimated 240,000 inhabitants³, when only London and Paris, among all Western cities, had more than half a million inhabitants. The population growth rate of the city remained high, such that twenty years later, the capital of the state of São Paulo already had half a million inhabitants.

Progress in the region, which led to a strong migratory flow, seemed unstoppable, exemplified by the decision of Ford to set up an automobile plant in 1919 in São Paulo as a result of its rapid development and foreseen economic growth.

² Law no. 601, of 18 Sep. 1850, known as the Land Law of 1850 (Lei de Terras de 1850), establishes the non-negotiable status of vacant land of the government by third parties, generating a huge stock of unused land and, consequently, increasing speculation of privately owned land.

³ According to the Demographic History of the City of São Paulo. Retrieved from: http://smul.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/historico_demografico/index.php. Accessed on: 26 Jun. 2023.

From the enthusiastic perspective of those who saw progress as inevitable, children at the beginning of the 20th century were born destined to learn and make the gears of progress and civilization turn.

From the beginning of that century, a new generation was to be prepared that would be able to bring about that progress: the children of that time would ensure the achievement of the necessary social and civilizing transformations; and the school, therefore, became the indispensable location for development of the child's intellectual formation⁴.

In the liberal school, the child is accepted for the child's own development, to protect the child's health, and to become intellectually ready in the direction of the child's own vocation and happiness⁵: the paramount role of the school is to promote a civilizing process through the liberal bourgeois ideology.

In Brazil, however, the child, in that period, is under the directional beacons of prejudices of social class and race; he/she is in the midst of a society that, a short time before, was slave-holding and of a nearly socially stratified nature, with few opportunities for social mobility.

Even though the agricultural sector was most important for the Brazilian economy, a mass of people, made up of former slaves and their descendants, of poor whites attached to landowners and, by the end of the 19th century, of immigrants, did not have the opportunity to own the means of agricultural production, and, for their livelihood, could only rely on selling their labor. These social groups entered the Brazilian 20th century without a clear opportunity for social mobility or a short-term perspective for political representation. They can rely only on their labor and that of their offspring to nearly imperceptibly make gains in overcoming the huge asymmetry in earnings that existed between the worker and the landowner.

The economy based on the principles of favors and political loyalty typical of the practices of the colonial rule of *coronels* (colonel / authoritarian strongman) toward those aggregated to it was an obstacle to economic liberalism, in the same way that racism coexisted with generalized miscegenation, away from the theories of social degradation. In other words, all these practices for preserving the privileges of the agrarian oligarchies made Brazil a country with aspirations for progress, yet without being able to depart from the ideologies of its past.

In particular, the state of São Paulo at the beginning of the 20th century, while taking on the new practices for admitting rural immigrant workers⁶ and with a strong process of industrialization in the capital city, carried along the conservative remnants of the old labor and agricultural production practices that were part of coffee growing in the 19th century in the Vale do Paraíba, where slaveholding coffee activity had prevailed. In São Paulo, the most conservative oligarchies began to encounter increasing resistance from new opposing forces born of industrialization and the massive influx of immigrants.

⁴ Norbert Elias (2010) depicts the 20th century as the century of the child, that in which humanity came to raise children as a particular social group that, during this period, could participate in a more significant way in decisions before their parents. This process, as Elias suggests, characterizes the civilizing process that reinforces self-control as a solution for social interaction.

⁵ John Dewey (1959), in his political philosophy essays, refers to democracy as development of individuality, of self-realization in the context of collective action.

⁶ The influx of immigrant workers dates back to the experience of the *Fazenda de Ibicaba* which, in 1840, began hiring European families to work in its crop fields. This type of hiring mainly spread to the labor performed in Brazilian coffee fields (ARGOLLO FERRÃO, 1999).

Child education, literacy training, democracy, and social mobility

The liberal view of the republican elites on the exercise of citizenship considered the expansion of political representation as the initial step to be taken for transformation of Brazil⁷. Access to the vote was, in practical terms, the basic condition for political representation for the exercise of citizenship and the guarantee that the social transformations demanded by the defenders of the republic would be sustained.

During the First Republic, the electoral process was subject to all sort of fraud and means of intimidation to legitimate the perpetuation of those that assumed local political power⁸. Even if the census clause had been eliminated, the requirement of literacy⁹ in that period represented a very efficient filter to ensure that the majority vote would be directed to the representatives of the oligarchies.

At the same time, the republican school system proved to be inefficient, with low rates of grade progression and reduced attendance of students in schools; in the state of São Paulo, this can be seen through data from the Educational Yearbooks of the State of São Paulo (*Anuários do Ensino do Estado de São Paulo*)¹⁰.

In 1918, Oscar Thompson, general director of public education, considered it important to place greater attention on illiterate students, since less than a third of students enrolled in the first year of school groups reached the 4th grade, the other two thirds dropped out between the 2nd and 3rd grades¹¹.

The school not only had low productivity, but also confronted obstacles in relation to the supply of teachers, because given the expansion of openings for students, the conditions available for teacher training proved to be insufficient to provide the number of professionals with the quality required¹².

From the perspective of republican ideology, the role of the teacher was considered fundamental to stimulate the civic, rational, and liberal behavior of students, providing the conditions necessary for them to govern themselves, as well as to live in a civilized society.

⁷ Regarding the three foundations of the monarchy, see ALONSO, Ângela. *Instauração da República no Brasil*. In: SCHWARCZ, Lilia M.; STARLING, Heloisa M. (organizadoras). *Dicionário da República: 51 textos críticos*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019, p. 165.

⁸ Sarmiento and Souza Neto (2012, p. 111-114) state: “In short, it was a perfectly liberal Constitution, quite committed, in its text, to the rule of law. In practice, however, constitutional life in the Old Republic was very far from liberalism, characterized by *coronel* rule, electoral fraud, and the political will of governing bodies... In general, it can be said that the 1891 Constitution was hardly effective. Between the constitutional country – liberal and democratic – and the real country – authoritarian and oligarchic, an unbridgeable abyss has always remained.”

⁹ Proof of literacy in the electoral registration procedure was also proof, through the references requested, of being within the favored class, either as a member or as aggregated to it: “To be registered as a voter, the citizen need to prove that he could read and write, writing his name, status, parental information, age, profession, and residence in a special book before the registration commission” (NICOLAU, 2002, p. 238).

¹⁰ Biblioteca Digital Seade. Retrieved from: <https://bibliotecadigital.seade.gov.br/view/listarPublicacao.php?pagina=1&lista=0&opcao=8&busca=12&tipoFiltro=&filtro=&descFiltro=&varOrdem=&ordem=&listarConteudo=Cole%C3%A7%C3%B5es%20C2%BB%20Anu%C3%A1rio%20do%20Ensino%20de%20Estado%20de%20S%C3%A3o%20Paulo&limit=6>. Accessed on: 26 Jun. 2023.

¹¹ Souza (1999, p.131) indicates that “According to the School Census (*Recenseamento Escolar*) of 1920, there were 547,975 children of school age in that year in the state of São Paulo ... Of that number, 175,830 attended schools, either public or private, and the rest, 67.9%, did not attend school. The number of those illiterate came to 74.2% of the children residing in the state” (SOUZA, 1998a, p.101).

¹² The question of teacher training was also focused on by the Sampaio Dória Reform: “the unification of the São Paulo state teacher training schools eliminated the duality that existed between primary and secondary teacher training [...] Teacher education of a single type was undoubtedly a fundamental measure for strengthening teacher training schools of the state in the 1920s” (HONORATO, 2017, p. 4).

In accordance with this republican ideology, it would be fitting to analyze literacy not only in the sphere of exercising citizenship through the effect of exclusion from the electoral filter¹³, but also in the role of this step in the context of the educational process developed by the school curriculum offered at the beginning of the Republic, in which literacy training would constitute only the first step of the curricular path that, ideally, would be completed by the student.

The penalty for the failure of primary education only fell on the children of the less favored classes, who depended on education both to have access to full exercise of their citizenship and to try to break down the strong barriers that society placed on them for social class mobility.

Those benefiting from the oligarchies, or their children, were not even placed under the mercy of the liberal republican discourse that flirted with positivist organization of secondary education subjects; and secondary education was a stage inaccessible to the vast majority of children of the disadvantaged.

In fact, Law no. 1750, of 18 Dec. 1920¹⁴, which systematizes the Sampaio Dória reform, deals with the children of the elite in a differentiated manner; they were given the choice of attending private school or proceeding with education in the home school mold.

The obligation to attend public school was not placed on the children of the wealthy as it was established for the others. Those responsible for those who were required to be present in public school desks were accountable to the state, at the risk of being punished with a fine or even imprisonment if they did not comply with the law.

Undoubtedly, the universalization of primary education and literacy were complex questions that were more deeply involved with liberal republican discourse intended for dissemination at that time than a concrete, effective factor to promote social mobility.

In that period, Brazilian education was not, in fact, a system directed toward social promotion, given that only representatives of oligarchies were able to complete all stages of its curriculum. In addition, the failure to deal with the curriculum of secondary education shows the complete disregard for high school, which was not of interest to this social class. The republican educational reforms, particularly the Benjamin Constant Reform (1890), the Epiáfio Pessoa Code (1901), the Rivadávia Correa Reform (1911), and the Carlos Maximiliano Reform (1915), did not achieve any success in making the secondary school curriculum relevant to those who would attend classes with only the aim of completing college.

¹³ As Silva (1998, p. 22-23) states, “All are equal before the law. [...] And it is in this space that the illiterate citizen is placed by the Republic: a declarative place of denial of citizenship itself [...] Thus, writing becomes a criterion for selection and exclusion of individuals from our society, acquiring a legal statute. The illiterate person acquires visibility and writing carries the possibility of a new solution to maintain old inequalities, to homogenize heterogeneity and difference in a bourgeois, urban, and industrial order, which opposes / fits within an oligarchic, rural, and agricultural society”.

¹⁴ Title III of Compulsory Nature reads: “Article 4. - Children between 9 and 10 years of age are obliged to attend school free of charge, with the option of enrolling children of other ages in the event of openings. § 1 - The following are exempt from this obligation: a) when there is no public school in an area of two kilometers radius or there is no opening in the schools that exist within this area; b) those suffering from physical or mental disability, or a contagious or repulsive disease; c) through indigence, as long as they are not provided with the clothing essential for decency and hygiene; d) if they receive primary instruction at home or in a private education establishment. § 2. - Parents, tutors, or whoever acts at times in this regard are responsible for the enrollment and attendance of children obliged to attend primary school. § 3 - The parent, tutor, or guardian who, when notified, violates the previous §, will incur a fine of 20\$000 to 100\$000, or a penalty of 15 days in prison, at the discretion of the competent authority”.

In summary, it can be said that in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century, practically all students coming from privileged classes only sought exams and preparatory courses for colleges, without the slightest interest in attending secondary education, while the others barely managed to enroll in primary school¹⁵.

It is in this context at the beginning of the century that enthusiasm for education is rekindled and efforts are renewed for a universal offer of schooling to children, which, on the one hand, was a way of assigning full citizenship by eradicating illiteracy and, on the other hand, a means of giving shape to the new society that was to be built by the nation and the republic.

Facts suggest that the Sampaio Dória Reform not only asserted the clear provisions of the legal regulations of the Republic and its liberal and democratic ideology, gathering São Paulo children for their literacy training and universalizing access to the first grades of school, but also intended to bring to school children who were in the shadows.

Analyzing the environment in which the reform was conceived, it is indeed fitting to first discuss what its text proposed, since, in processes of institutional transformation for any suggested change, there is always something that remains under the mantle of stability. This item that is protected in that which is to be reformed generally refers to those with whom consensus is sought; it declares by silence both the extent to which the mosaic of power is drawn up and the relationships and practices that are intended to be preserved.

However, “making the problem of reform a problem of managing social change means accepting the social relations and underlying power that shape and model institutional agreements as being natural, normal, and inevitable” (POPKEWITZ, 1997, p. 26). In other words, the letter of the law does not in itself configure the social transformation it aims to achieve.

Children in the cries of strikers in São Paulo

Clashes among progressives, new school advocates, conservatives, libertarians, and politicians from the agricultural oligarchies become real within the São Paulo reform of 1920, as these forces were already harbored in São Paulo, where their discourses had ripened¹⁶.

However, in the chapters immediately preceding the pages of the Sampaio Dória Reform, there are two events of great importance for the urban social experience in a large city of the 20th century, as São Paulo was becoming: the Workers’ Strike of 1917 and the Spanish Flu of 1918.

The Workers’ Strike of 1917 can be seen within a broad process of the struggle of workers at the beginning of the 20th century in search of better working conditions and establishment of regulatory laws between capital and labor.

Conflicts of this nature proceeded internationally during the end of the second decade of the 1900s. Conflicts took place in different ways in the various scenarios where they broke out through the confrontation of different economic actors. For example, in tsarist Russia, the conflict was between landowners and peasants who sought better conditions for land distribution, as in Russia in 1917; in the US, in various parts of the country, it was due to workers' strikes; in Portugal, it was in the popular uprising of the

¹⁵ The reform becomes a milestone, as stated by ANTUNHA (1967), p. 59: “It is important to remember that, since primary education was, up to that time, exclusively a matter of state authority and the federal government retreated from committing itself to its development, the São Paulo movement must have served, at least, as a wake-up call, to make primary education a national issue, even from the perspective of the security of the country and its institutions - and to facilitate progressive interest of federal administration in this domain”.

¹⁶ How to teach, what to teach, who will be responsible for teaching, and why should children be taught through the authority and management of the state were questions underlying all the controversies for creating public management of education, delineating public policies of the federal government, states, and municipalities and the respective spheres of responsibility.

Potato Revolt (PEREIRA, 2014); and in the *Biennio Rosso*, it was with factory strikes and, at the same time, the rapid adherence of workers to the Italian Socialist Party and to anarcho-syndicalism (1919 and 1920)¹⁷.

It is impossible to ignore that the unbridled pursuit of profit in the incipient industry of São Paulo, exploiting European immigrants under the yoke of labor contracts as inhumane or worse than those offered by coffee growing, as well as the poor housing and food conditions that immigrant, black, and mestizo families experienced in the poor neighborhoods of the city¹⁸, contributed to the dissemination of anarchist and socialist discourse that had also spread in Europe and the USA.

In fact, at the edges of the urban design of the city that was being developed and, why not admit it, in the background of the speeches given in that period on education, a huge number of children crept through the alleys and tenements, engaged in the daily labors of their families. This poor population lived in a city “completely different, hidden, and distanced from the one that was formed with European airs” (MORAES, 1997, p.42).

It must be considered that in the first twenty years of the 20th century, the city of São Paulo had a mean birth rate considered relatively high (around 35 births per thousand inhabitants) under the strong effect of the birth rate in immigrant families, which increased particularly from 1912 to 1917 (BAENINGER; BASSANEZI, 2016, p.5).

A growing number of illiterate children moved through neighborhoods where Portuguese was just one among many languages spoken, where low-paid work was offered to ensure maximum return resulting from the rapid economic growth of industry that had arisen to replace the European factories destroyed by the First World War.

Celebration of the combination of factors favorable to the large agricultural-industrial financial capital of the state of São Paulo occurred in the urban transformation of its capital city, which, despite its poor neighborhoods with families crowded in hovels and tenements, had a triumphal architectural discourse, in which “the city has kind of the air of an international exposition” (SEVCENKO, 2009).

São Paulo was not a city of blacks, of whites, or of mestizos; not of foreigners or Brazilians; not American, not European, not native; it was not even industrial, despite the growing volume from factories, or an agricultural warehouse, despite the critical importance of coffee; it was not tropical or subtropical; it was not yet modern, but it no longer had a past. This city that sprouted suddenly and inexplicably, like a colossal mushroom after the rain, was an enigma to its own perplexed inhabitants, trying to understand it as they could, while struggling not to be devoured (SEVCENKO, 2009, p.31).

¹⁷ Currently, the conflicts of this period are discussed through the cultural shift that contributed to produce a profound transformation in the interaction of proletariats with capital. All of them are similar in presenting confrontations of the poor of the cities against the owners of capital, the peasants without resources against the landowners, representing complete scarcity against strength: “The working conditions, the insufficient wages and repression were factors that stimulated the conflicts and protests of those years, creating a climate of permanent tension, at times explosive, like the conflicts that occurred in São Paulo, New York, Turin, Saint Petersburg, Sydney, and many other cities. The experiences and creations arising from the strikes of that period were so remarkable that, for historiography, they configure the beginning of a new cycle of labor struggles and even the formation of a *new working class* (PROCACCI, 2013). The war economy contributed to intensify solidarity among workers by revealing the contradictions of capitalism and the market economy” (CASTELLUCCI, TOLEDO, CORREIA, 2017, p.76).

¹⁸ The Barra Funda neighborhood was the geographic space of the city that brought together white, black, and mixed-race immigrants, all poor. However, there, in the vicinity of Largo da Banana, cultural practices were carried out that symbolized an informal political resistance, in which through samba, of the carnival groups, identity boundaries were demarcated, racial rhetoric was reinforced, and a symbolic complex of African roots was displayed (SIQUEIRA, 2020). They were “Afro-diasporic performances, symbols, and artifacts that were obliterated, when not rejected, in São Paulo in the period of the First Republic”.

The transcendentalism of the metropolis was harmoniously inserted in the state of which it was the capital. The mansions of the coffee barons whose capital had contributed to build the industrial park, full employment, and the rising birth rate, made the liberal Republic fully glow in it, even though it was under the political command of the old agrarian oligarchy.

The Strike of 1917, which began on July 9, resulting from the enormous gap in workers' wages compared to the cost of food and from poor working conditions, including the use of child labor, closed down activities for 30 days in the city of São Paulo and, between the lines of the text of republican democracy, the blots of its contradictions appeared¹⁹.

Change in the negotiation paradigm between factory owners and workers' representatives became urgent²⁰, as successive strikes in various parts of the world proved to be effective both in halting local production and in their ability to spread to other places, cities, and countries, in different scenarios and among unexpected economic actors.

Socialist and anarchist discourses offered the worker instruments that were able to make him confront the fragmentation that had been derived from the strong division of industrial labor; already in the mid-nineteenth century, industrial production had deprived the craft worker not only of the means of production that he owned, but also of the value of the broad wisdom of his activity and of the breadth of understanding he had of his practice.

Here, mention should be made of the libertarian pedagogy inspired by the educator Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, which gained followers and was practiced in "modern schools". That pedagogy was intended to form a new man for a new society, and its basic motto was "a free man on free land". The concatenated existence itself of this model of school (located at Rua Saldanha Marinho, 58 and Rua Muller, 74) and of the anarchist press (such as *A Plebe*, *A Lanterna*, and *Operário*) headquartered in São Paulo and in other states of Brazil shows a network that organized the Brazilian labor movement linked to others around the world (GALLO, 2013).

The modern schools in São Paulo did not go unnoticed by public authorities, especially after the Strike of 1917. As soon as possible, their permission was revoked. In 1919, when a bomb exploded in the house of an anarchist family in the Brás neighborhood under the pretext of avoiding anarchist actions such as those that had led to the Strike of 1917 and to the Anarchist Insurrection in Rio de Janeiro in 1918, the determination was made to close all of them.

Forgotten by the rich elite of São Paulo society, the disheartened working-class population that suffered from the high cost of food and from precarious labor and housing conditions could not find the means to teach reading and writing to their children, who were

¹⁹ The inability to confront the stoppage and the lack of knowledge of how to take effective steps in negotiation made the city a deserted field for 30 days: "São Paulo is a dead city: its population is alarmed, the faces denote apprehension and panic, because everything is closed, without the slightest movement. In the streets, apart from a few hurried passersby, only military vehicles circulated, requisitioned by the Antártica company and other industries, with troops armed with rifles and machine guns. There are orders to shoot anyone who stands still in the street. In the industrial districts of Brás, Moóca, Barra Funda, and Lapa, there have been gunfights with groups of people; in certain streets, barricades have already begun to be made with stones, old wood, and overturned wagons. The police do not dare to pass through, because sure shots come from rooftops and corners. The newspapers come out full of news nearly without comments, but what is known is of utmost seriousness, foreseeing dramatic happenings" (DIAS, 1977, p.56 and 57).

²⁰ In 1914, after failed negotiations for better wages and working conditions, a community of miners and their families camped around a mine property is decimated by the Colorado National Guard and militias. That was the Ludlow massacre, which took place in the USA on April 20 of that year, with men, women, and children as victims. In 1917, the movement that began in 1905 for land distribution contributed its unsatisfied demands to that which triggered the Russian Revolution. From 1910 to 1920, a clear perception arose that negotiations between the owners of capital and workers and/or peasants would have to be carried out under new models in order to avoid escalation of the conflict with loss of life, as well as material damage and damage to the established order.

often busy with tasks in factories and workshops. In those work places, the children could understand the meaning of the speeches in defense of the proletariat, and the São Paulo government was able to foresee that.

The Spanish Flu²¹ in São Paulo and public education by the “Conselhos ao Povo”

Since the end of the 19th century, the perception came to be established that school was a privileged environment and that through education, moral values, patriotism, and the practices advocated by hygienists for the well-being of citizens would be disseminated; it was also in the 19th century that the state gradually assumed the role of being co-responsible for the physical, moral, and intellectual development of children.

As Costa (2005, p.23) states, “the child, hitherto manipulated by religion and as an object of family ownership, will once more see itself used, in the 19th century, as an instrument of power. This time, however, against parents, in favor of the State.”

For Brazil, already during the first movements of the Republic, the cultivation of patriotism was on the agenda of education and, in addition, the aim was to improve the composition of Brazilian nationality and training of a worker guided within the purposes of rationalization and in moral values (ROCHA, 2003, p. 43). “For that purpose, in schools, physical exercise comes to play a relevant role in correcting the abnormality that characterizes this poor, sick, and amoral population, a correction to be performed on the students' own bodies” (ABREU JÚNIOR; CARVALHO, 2012, p. 4).

However, the pandemic emergency nature of the Spanish flu, whose contagion capacity rapidly overcame the sanitary barriers imposed in various parts of the world to prevent its spread, put in check the mechanisms for protecting public health in São Paulo and, in particular, the health of residents of the city of São Paulo.

the problem was different, it was an eminently educational issue; education and hygiene emerged as two of the major means to try to end the flu in the critical period of the epidemic [...] at that time, doctors from the Health Service and part of the press joined together to try to educate those residing in the city of São Paulo: some issuing instructions, others in support efforts, especially publicizing the measures proposed by the medical authorities (BERTUCCI-MARTINS, 2003, p.8).

In the city of São Paulo, as in other locations in the country, the health information presented in writing to the population ran up against a significant number of illiterate persons - in the case of some regions, most of the people were illiterate.

The poor gained little protection from the state, and there were many reasons for that. It was not only the lack of reading competence, but the very precariousness of the basic conditions they had available for sanitary practices, which leads to the observation that very contagious diseases affect the whole society, but in an uneven manner.

As the poor had little protection from the state, contagious diseases affected them more intensely and, consequently, they were hurt not only by the lack of competence to read written instructions – the recommendations to the population (“*conselhos ao povo*”), but also by the

²¹ This refers to the influenza strain of 1918 brought about by the virus H1N1, popularly known as “The Spanish Flu” by attributing its origin, erroneously, to Spain.

severity of the disease resulting from the very precariousness of the basic conditions offered by the state for hygiene practices in their homes.

Hygienism had been incorporated into school practices, but few children from poor families attended school, and an even smaller number actually became literate.

The Spanish flu dramatically highlighted the fragility of the social fabric resulting from the fact that a large part of the population was cut off from education.

Teaching of foreign languages at that time: the case of Spanish and the political turnabout

Notably at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, the growth of immigration flows to Brazil was accompanied by the emergence of bilingual schools for European languages, expanding the offer that had previously been restricted to English in American schools of a religious nature.

In that period, bilingual schools were created in the South and Southeast region because of immigration, to assist immigrants from Germany, Ukraine, Italy, Poland, etc. (LASECA, 2008, p.54).

This process mainly occurred under the responsibility of religious and ethnic community schools (KREUTZ, 2000). An example is the founding of the Dante Alighieri High School (*Colégio Dante Alighieri*) on the part of Italian immigrants, which occurred in 1911 in the city of São Paulo.

The teaching of Spanish in the Brazilian educational system was inaugurated in 1919, when there was a competitive examination for the position of Spanish teacher in Pedro II High School as a result of an increase in the grant for creation of the position through approval of Law 3674, of 7 Jan. 1919²².

The first teacher to assume the position of Spanish teacher in Pedro II High School was Antenor Nascentes (1886-1972), who was responsible for publication of the first grammar book: *Gramática da Língua Espanhola*, published by Companhia Editora Nacional in 1920.

However, the successive political changes that took place at the end of the second decade and the disputes that occurred in the area of education helped to place educational priority on the task of literacy, leaving the teaching of foreign languages and, by extension, also Secondary Education, in the background.

The reform known as the Rocha Vaz Law follows this trend, which through Decree 16,782-A, of 13 Jan. 1925, refers to Spanish and to Italian as optional subjects, such that the Spanish teacher position could be eliminated and the teacher transferred to a second position as Portuguese teacher.

The teacher Antenor Nascentes himself, upon elimination of the Spanish teacher position, took up the second position as Portuguese teacher.

It is important to note that this new direction given to the teaching of foreign languages is in accord with the republican, liberal, and nationalist theses held by increasingly influential groups in the 1920s, as in the case of the *tenentism* movement, which took up the causes of “reform of public education, mandatory primary education, and the moralization of politics” (SCHWARCZ, STARLING, 2015, p.348), transforming literacy into increasingly valued political capital.

²² Art.2, section 23: “Grant to teaching institutes: Increase of 9:600\$ at Pedro II High School to meet expenses upon creation of the Spanish teacher position in that high school, in reciprocity for a identical act of the Republic of Uruguay.”

The children in the São Paulo public school: few of the many children who should be educated

From the beginning of the Republic until 1920, organization of São Paulo's public schools relied on the combination of three school models: separate schools, clusters of schools, and school groups. In contrast, teacher training was carried out by complementary schools, which were converted into pedagogical institutes for “training of preliminary teachers”, and by normal (teacher training) schools.

With the purpose of serving as a paradigm for republican education to be instituted in the state, the Caetano de Campos Normal School, whose origin dates back to the Normal School of the Capital of 1846²³, was based in the building designed by Antônio Francisco de Paula Sousa and Ramos de Azevedo in 1894²⁴.

The impressive building and the connection between teacher training and the model school²⁵ implemented the rationalization and standardization plans for education proposed by the republican leaders of the state, but the dissemination of their proposal and its results were not perceptible throughout the whole of public education.

While the children of the São Paulo elite had access to teachers selected to work in the Model School and experienced graded class groups with programming of content and structured times, there were still many isolated schools with heterogeneous groups of students of various age ranges and that had difficulty in paying or maintaining an experienced teacher.

It is noteworthy that, in principle, Pestalozzi's influence prevailed and, thus, Law no. 88, of 8 Sep. 1892, established for the model schools that, in relation to the teaching method,

Article 6. Paragraph 1 - In the rules that are issued for carrying out this law, the subject matters that constitute what is taught and their distribution according to the intellectual development of the students will be meticulously specified in programs, strictly observing the principles of the intuitive method.

For kindergarten, the methods of Froebel are clearly mentioned in decree no. 397 of 9 Oct. 1896, where Article 181, chapter III determines:

²³ The school was founded to enforce what was in the law of primary education of the Province of São Paulo, which, in Article thirty-one, determined: “The government shall establish in the Capital of the Province a normal school of primary education” (Escola Normal de São Paulo. Núcleo de Referência em Memória da Educação, of the Centro de Referência em Educação Mário Covas / CRE, of the Secretaria de Estado da Educação de São Paulo, 2002, p.2).

²⁴ The architecture for school groups of that time became specific in order to accommodate school grades under hygienist notions, “it was no coincidence that the school buildings that began in São Paulo in the 1890s, going beyond the restricted perspective of the operation of their programs, were built aiming at monumentality [...] they simultaneously embodied a whole set of knowledge and political-educational projects, and they put into circulation the definitive model of education of the 19th century: that of school grades. Presented as a practice and representation that allowed the republicans to break with the imperial past, the school groups projected toward the future, projected a future, in which, in the Republic, the people, reconciled with the nation, would shape an orderly and progressive homeland” (VIDAL, FÁRIA FILHO, 2000, p. 6 and 7).

²⁵ “The Normal School of the Capital accommodated the Normal Course for teacher training (students as of 16 years of age) and the “Antonio Caetano de Campos” Preliminary Model School (7 to 11 years of age). Subsequently, pursuant to Law no. 374, of 3 Sep. 1895, the first Complementary Model School of the Capital was set up for students aged 11 to 14, aimed at training primary teachers at an early age, called *complementarists*. With the advent of the Republic, it also became possible to set up the first state Kindergarten. [...] Created adjoined to the Normal School of the Capital, and the result of the political project of the coffee bourgeoisie, which came into power through the republican party of São Paulo, the Kindergarten was conceived with the purpose of serving as an internship for normal school teachers” (Escola Normal de São Paulo. Núcleo de Referência em Memória da Educação, of the Centro de Referência em Educação Mário Covas/CRE, of the Secretaria de Estado da Educação de São Paulo, 2002, p.15 and 16).

The kindergarten, adjoining the Normal School of the Capital, is dedicated to preparing, through education of the senses, following the processes of Froebel, students of both sexes who aim at the model schools.

The school of the first decade of the Republic had been structured to carry out teaching in classes of a more uniform level of knowledge and, at the same time, to carry out teacher training. However, at the periphery of the system, for teacher activity, pedagogical practice often occurred in a way that was little more specialized than what had been done with teachers' helpers who practiced mutual instruction or the monitorial system in the 19th century.

However, the low efficiency of literacy obtained by schools in São Paulo, as observed in the data from the time cited above, contributed both to the entry and the spread of new educational currents and to the deepening of scientism in education²⁶.

A political-administrative operation on education was imminent, with the resulting legal effects, and that, in fact, was unfurled at the end of the first twenty years of the 20th century, bearing the standard of defense of compulsory schooling with the main purpose of developing literacy.

The rise of Washington Luís: the modernization of the state and the multiple civic roles of the school

Access to public schooling was included in the agenda of the political campaign and in the government platform of Washington Luís for governing São Paulo in 1920. In that political context, the motto of modernization of state management took up the discourse of republican democratization.

That then led to equating democratization through universal access to primary education, a banner of Washington Luís' campaign, with the economic restrictions in regard to rationalist management of state accounts.

In that sense, the controversial Sampaio Dória reform stands out, which, among other changes, proposed a reduction in the primary education course to two years in length²⁷, aiming to make the period of mandatory schooling equivalent to the average time (according to reports from previous years) that children actually remained in school.

In essence, due to the initiative and protective authority of the state, the measure basically aimed to combine both the eradication of illiteracy and the universalization of primary education. It therefore takes up the responsibility of the state with regard to education, justifying this action by the civilizing role that the liberal democratic discourse considered an attribution that the state could not renege.

Because of what was established in the enacted text of the Reform, compulsory attendance and freedom from cost were reduced, yet giving priority to the 9-10 age range and placing fees on secondary education.

It is important to emphasize that, according to what was experienced in the capital city of São Paulo, it was fitting to gather the children in school, because, in the industrial environment that was

²⁶ On the one hand, there is the emergence of childhood psychology and the New School, and, on the other hand, the revisionism of the intuitive method is carried out by evolutionist theory: "Just as for Spencer, governing of children should reproduce political history, according to Sampaio Dória, education should reproduce the history of humanity" (LIMA, 2020, p.14).

²⁷ Law 1750/1920 establishes in Title I, on the Extent of Public Education, Article 1, that "-Public Education, in the state of São Paulo, comprises: 1st – primary education of two years, which will be offered in separate schools, clusters of schools, and school groups; [...]", thus revoking Article 3 of Law no. 930, of 13 Aug. 1904, which established "-Education in the model school and in school groups will be distributed over four years."

being formed, their presence in the labor market, contrary to the logic experienced in the countryside, negatively pressured family earnings. In the Strike of 1917, demands included abolishing exploitation of the labor of children under 14 years of age in factories and workshops.

Sampaio Dória replaced Oscar Thompson at the head of the Board of Public Education and became the figure directly identified with the reform proposed in 1920 by the historiography dedicated to the history of education, although it is understandable to recognize that the voice attributed to Dória was supported by the political ascent of Washington Luís and his elevation to the presidency of the state of São Paulo on May 1 of that year.

Sampaio Dória's credentials upon assuming the position were his membership in the Nationalist League and his teaching at the Normal School. An additional proposal was "to solve the problem of illiteracy - presented in the Open Letter, in 1918..." (MEDEIROS, 2005, p. 25).

The political-social activity carried out by the Nationalist League combined the illiteracy eradication campaign with civic education in defense of secret ballots, military service, and the practice of scouting.

In fact, the founding of the Nationalist League is linked to the creation of the Patriotic Society, whose declared purposes were a) to develop a sense of national unity; b) to undertake campaigns for freedom, against civil and military attacks on the sovereignty of the nation; c) to bring about the vote through civil registration of legal adulthood, the system of a secret vote, the mandatory vote, a holiday on election days, and the most effective penalties against fraud; d) to disseminate general, professional, and civic education among the non-privileged classes in all corners of the country; and e) to organize and develop national defense through scouting, arms training, and military preparation.

The urban middle classes, in that period, not only intended to consolidate democracy and obtain expanded offers of opportunities for promotion of social mobility, but also supported the maintenance of public order and the defense of private property, basic values for the interests of the dominant classes. That leads to the conclusion that, from this perspective, the activism of the Nationalist League, typically of the middle class, contributed to the Sampaio Dória reform.²⁸

The government of Washington Luís carried out both educational reform and judiciary reform under the motto of democratization and administrative rationalization, embodied in the universalization of educational opportunities and equality in enforcement of the law.

The Sampaio Dória Reform is based on the political trajectory of Washington Luís, just as on the intellectual path of Sampaio Dória²⁹. Thus, the educational reform enacted responded to the social demands perceived by the sensitivity of the politician who had been mayor of the capital city from 1914 to 1919, and he confronted the complex dynamic of social forces that had taken harbor in the paths that connected the wealthy neighborhoods with those that poverty precariously inhabited.

The reform, thus configured, becomes more than an instrument of democratization, inspired by the values of the Nationalist League. It gives the document the condition of making school the place for gathering children who would, necessarily, have to become literate; that is, the school as a device of the state for civic mindedness would become universal.

The proposal of enrolling all children, aiming at promoting literacy but entailing reduction in the period children stay in school, is not presented as a discursive element in the

²⁸ It is important to consider that, according to Antunha (1967, p. 145), the Reform of 1920 was a personal endeavor of Dória – and not principally of the Nationalist League, as it contained details that were typically pedagogical.

²⁹ It is noteworthy that regarding the final text, Washington Luís ensured some important changes, such as placing fees on secondary education and giving priority to meeting the need for primary education for the age range from 9 to 10 years of age, going against the provisions of the reformer. Washington Luís also tried to extend implementation of the intended reform to the urban schools, which previously was only for the rural schools.

dialogue among thinkers in the area of education (which explains the strong rejection that it provoked in them), but it arises as an administrative solution inspired by the republican ideology directed toward the democratization of civic opportunities, the exercise of the vote, and protecting the childhood of poor children, since the favored children were not dependent on the benefits of the state.

The legal changes concerning the length of school attendance resulted from political and economic pressures in the educational field, the result of tensions between the duties of the state, changes in political power, and the demands of the poor, largely urban, population for school.

The 1920 reform received harsh criticism from political and social groups and education professionals, although it was during the period in which this reform was in effect (from 1920 to 1924) when the São Paulo education administration bodies took effective measures to enforce the school obligation, either by encouraging compulsory enrollment, or by imposing fines or campaigns in favor of attendance³⁰.

Final Considerations

At the beginning of the 20th century, Brazilian education was still directed toward serving the educational needs of the children of the elites and a few others that would be subservient to them.

The total sedimentation existing among the economic forces of a basically agricultural exporting country forced the Republic to prolong discussions about schooling that had already occurred since the 19th century. Concretely, the reports produced in regard to school practice referred only to what can be inferred from the educational opportunity offered to a tiny portion of the population.

The population growth of São Paulo, the accumulation of wealth of the state, and the discrepant living conditions available to poor families became a fulcrum of transformations capable of making the proposal of democracy announced by the republicans confront the traditional management of the state apparatus and institutions and, in particular, of education.

The list of opportunities that literacy gathered together through universal access to school also included access to voting and the basic exercise of citizenship, as well as school attendance for children whose only ambition, up until then, would have been to contribute to the income of their families at the risk of sunstroke suffered in the countryside, of possible injuries caused by factory machinery, or of abandonment on the streets of poor neighborhoods in the city.

The equality of opportunities gained by access to school does not eliminate inequality nor does it allow quality to encapsulate quantity in a single formulation so that its effects can be seen to be balanced. However, the action that is carried out on behalf of democracy understood in terms of equal offer of opportunities, as indicated by Azanha (2004), also means giving state institutes, which begin to serve those who were previously excluded, the ability to become sensitized to social demands that were previously muted and, therefore, to welcome the discourse of those who had been excluded.

³⁰ The reports of educational delegates, published in the 1923 Yearbook of Education of the State of São Paulo (*Anuário do Ensino do Estado de São Paulo*), give news of hundreds of fines applied to parents who did not enroll their school-age children. There are also reports of campaigns carried out, some with the help of scout groups from public schools, to increase attendance, involving publication in local newspapers of the percentages obtained, records of attendance on blackboards placed in front of teaching establishments, and correspondence sent to the families of absent students demanding strict justification of absences (SOUZA, 1998, p.60).

The school that is at issue through the pedagogical clashes that followed the moments of effective universalization of access is now required to respond to the specific needs of countless beneficiaries who, previously, were absolutely ignored by it.

The middle classes originating from urban growth took up the values of civic-mindedness by increasing participation in governments, in the same way that their immediate needs came to include preparation for job positions that arose in the complex socioeconomic dynamics of cities.

The stoppage brought about by the Strike of 1917 damaged the economy, but the fear, from the beginning, of it representing the formidable popular movements that spread throughout the world and led, for example, to the Russian Revolution, allowed the mayor of the city, through negotiations conducted for workers to return to production, to demonstrate political experience able to achieve success before the elite, the middle class, and the humblest classes.

Hygienism, with the school as a device for state control over children's health, intensifies discussion after confronting the Spanish Flu in 1918, when educating the population became urgent.

That way, through the power of the state, the Sampaio Dória Reform led to some proposals arising from the watchwords of patriotic republicanism, managing to utilize the complex concept of democracy as justification for the action of attributing to the state the responsibility of gathering children together for their literacy training. That also meant taking care of their health and gathering them together to teach republican civil-mindedness.

The Sampaio Dória Reform summarizes a set of social needs under the motto of Washington Luís' campaign to combat illiteracy. It was at the heart of a government proposal that claimed to modernize the state, including, in its actions, a reform in the judiciary and a significant integration of the regions of the state by roadways.

Washington Luís proved to be a skilled politician during his political career that would later lead him to the presidency of the republic, which allows us to assume that the educational reform presented by Sampaio Dória, through the discursive bias of the São Paulo middle class and declared by the Nationalist League, reconciled ideological interests that were harbored in the clash between the dominant classes and those subordinated to them, under the mantle of the uncontested defense of democracy³¹.

Having all children in school means having rich and poor under the same educational prerogative and all genders and races as well, attributing to this age group a provisional status of a tenuous truce among social inequalities. That way, if, in Dória's pedagogical perspective, the intuitive method would be effective in educating all children, respecting their differences³², in his civic vision, the future society of healthy and competent citizens was to be created by the school, while civilization and progress established the commitment within classrooms to ignore social differences in favor of equal opportunities.

³¹ Reis Filho emphasizes that, in the reforms undertaken in the State of São Paulo, there was an adjustment between political interests and pedagogical convictions, to the point of considering that, for the government, "well-directed public education is the strongest and most effective element of progress..." (1981, p.79).

³² "The importance and strength of this method came from its total correspondence with this greater law, insofar as in it and with it the child could learn, treading the same steps taken by humanity in the process of civilization." The law referred to by the author is the law of abbreviated recapitulation (CARVALHO, 2010, p. 60).

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