

## **Educational Reforms in the First Republic (1889 to 1930) in the light of Paulo Freire's epistemological categories**

### **Abstract**

With the proclamation of independence in 1889, Brazilian society needed to transform itself to build the long-awaited Republic of liberals and Freemasons, or of liberals/Freemasons. Thus, the period from 1889 to 1930, known as the First Republic, is marked in the country's history. The guiding question of the research is: Did the educational reforms of the First Republic aim at a social and economic transformation in Brazil? Based on Heidegger's Hermeneutic Phenomenology (1967), we intend to critically interpret the public policies of this period based on Paulo Freire's thinking, bringing this perspective of education with a role of change in the subjects who transform the reality in which they live. Therefore, our theoretical framework includes Nagle (2001), Carvalho (1987), and Freire (2001). This approach was made through a dialogue between three central characteristics of the politics of this period: liberalism, nationalism, and positivism; and Freirean concepts: liberation, power, and culture.

### **Introduction**

With the end of the monarchical period and the establishment of a new political regime that began in 1889 with the Brazilian First Republic, it was of fundamental importance to create a new educational policy in line with the republican Brazil, that is, an education for the formation of the republican citizen.

This period of the country is marked by some central aspects for the formation of the republican citizen, which are: nationalism, positivism, and liberalism.

Nationalism was essential at this moment, as the intention was, through symbolism and its meanings, to build a Brazilian republican nation, and for this to happen, the republicans would have to have an education capable of awakening in the people the love for the homeland and working for the country's development.

The prosperity of the country was linked to economic growth and to the evolution of science. Positivism marks the idea of progress through science.

Liberalism, embodied mainly by Freemasons from the early movements towards the proclamation of Independence, was the opposition to the control that the Catholic Church had over the monarchical state, that is, it essentially imposes the separation between Church and State. After all, since 1864, the Encyclical *Quanto Cura*, by Pope Pius IX, with the Syllabus, condemned liberalism, among other "isms".

In this period, Brazilian society faces great challenges of social and educational structure, with illiteracy being one of the most difficult educational urgencies to solve. Faced with this scenario, some reforms were implemented to establish a republican education, as Benjamin Constant Reform (1890), Epiácio Pessoa Code (1901), Rivadávia Corrêa Organic Law (1911), Carlos Maximiliano Reform (1915) and João Luis Alves and Rocha Vaz Reform (1925), and regional reforms based on the ideas of the New School (1926-1930).

In a search for research collections, it is possible to find many searches about the period of the First Republic. We highlight four works: *Education in the First Republic (1889 - 1930)* (Porto Júnior, 2003); *The Republic and education in Brazil: First Republic (1889 - 1930)* (Palma Filho, 2005); *School education in the First Republic: memory, history, and research perspectives* (Schueler & Magaldi, 2008), *Education in the First Republic* (Magalhães, 2006), in addition to Jorge Nagle's doctoral thesis (1966), later transformed into a book titled *Education and society in the first republic*. However, we did not find research that critically analyzes this period of education in Brazil from a Freirean perspective.

Therefore, the central objective of the research that gave rise to this article is to understand the education of the Brazilian First Republic from a Freirean perspective. The guiding question is: Did the educational reforms of the First Republic aim at a social transformation in Brazil?

Based on Hermeneutic Phenomenology, we intend to critically interpret the public policies of this period, or rather, the State policies, and engage with the categories of liberation, power, and culture in Paulo Freire. By using this method, we unveil the phenomenon to get as close as possible to the truth, to reality. And it is hermeneutic because in addition to unveiling reality, we interpret the phenomenon. A critical interpretation with Freirean lenses.

The combination of methods carried out by Heidegger (1967) seeks the essence of the phenomenon, "the Essence of acting, however, lies in consummation. Consummation means leading a thing to the summit, to the fullness of its Essence. Bringing it to this fullness, *producere*" (Heidegger, 1967, pp. 23-24).

Using Freirean categories to analyze a period prior to Paulo Freire in Brazilian education is a way of understanding the past through new lenses, a new perspective in which we intend to fill gaps in knowledge regarding the reference that underpins the methodological analyses of historical research on teaching reforms in Brazil, starting with the first, the Benjamin Constant Reform. The theoretical basis of this reform materializes what has come to be called positivist inversion, emphasizing technique over theory, the so-called exact sciences over the human sciences.

Our theoretical framework includes Nagle (2001), Carvalho (1987 and 1990), and Freire (2001). This approach was made possible through three central characteristics of the politics of this period: liberalism, nationalism, and positivism; and three Freirean categories: liberation, power, and culture.

The category of liberation in Paulo Freire has a central meaning in the education of individuals and, consequently, in the conception of the world. "History is a time of possibility and not of determinations. And if it is a time of possibilities, the first consequence that comes to the fore is that History is not only but also demands freedom" (Freire, 2001, p. 19). Therefore, liberation lies in the possibility that each individual has to transform reality and change the course of history.

Liberation in the Freirean view is imbued with an ethical rigor that requires education for responsibility,"... aimed, therefore, at the liberation of injustices and discriminations of class, sex, and race" (Freire, 2001, p. 44).

In a phenomenological sense, the category of liberation in Freire aims at unveiling the truth in an ethical and political manner.

The category of power in Freire is directly connected to the question of class struggle, which determines the "limits of political-educational practice" (Freire, 2001, p. 25). Because political struggle is essentially a struggle for power, which makes it urgent to "learn to deal with the instruments of power" (Freire, 2001, p. 51) to use them in favor of the political dream.

In this sense, Freire explains that every individual as a social and historical being is conditioned but has the capacity to recognize this conditioning and overcome their own limits, programming themselves to learn. Consequently, every individual as a social and historical being has the power to learn, change their own worldview, and transform reality by freeing themselves from what is established.

The category of culture in Freire is of utmost importance to understand the need for individuals for liberating education. Every individual in the world is built on cultural foundations of the space and time in which they live, so every individual is culture because "The City is culture, creation... The City is us and we are the City [...]" (Freire, 2001, p. 13).

Culture being part of the formation of individuals is also a political and social power that can work to maintain the *status quo* or, on the contrary, for the radical transformation of reality.

The article is divided into three sections. First, we conduct an interpretive analysis of the reforms carried out in this period in relation to Brazilian basic education; then, we seek to unveil the changes in relation to Brazilian secondary and higher education; and last, we address the republican educational project from the

Freirean idea that it is not education that transforms society, but rather, people; so, educational transformation is not possible without social transformation.

### **Primary Education in the First Republic**

The country was undergoing a significant political and social change, transitioning from a monarchical regime to a republic. This period of the First Republic is also known as the Old Republic or Oligarchic Republic, characterized by political forces based on land ownership - oligarchs were the large landowner's post-abolition of slavery. Brazilian society had an agrarian elite, immigrant workers, and rural workers. It was still a society marked by social, economic, and political inequalities.

In Brazil, there was no prior revolution. Despite the abolition of slavery, society was characterized by profound inequalities and the concentration of power. Liberalism took on a character of consecrating inequality, of sanctioning the law of the strongest. Coupled with presidentialism, republican Darwinism had in its hands the ideological and political instruments to establish a deeply authoritarian regime (Carvalho, 1990, p. 25).

Europe and the United States of America were the major reference points for those who wanted to build a Brazilian Republic. Europe, especially France, reflected the theoretical reference, while the USA represented the practice of liberalism. In essence, a conservative, positivist liberalism. Therefore, positivism was in vogue, aiming to achieve progress through order and science. It was used as political, economic, and social power. The category of power in the Freirean perspective is directly related to class conflict.

The critical understanding of the limits of practice has to do with the problem of power, which is class-based and is related, for that reason, to the question of class struggle and conflict. Understanding the level at which class struggle exists in a given society is essential for

demarcating the spaces, the contents of education, the historically possible, and the limits of political-educational practice (Freire, 2001, p. 25).

About this, we argue that Brazilian society is historically divided by social classes with significantly disparate socio-economic levels. The Republican Brazil had two concerns: to prepare the country for industry, at that time primarily focused on coffee production and trade, and the First World War (1914 - 1918) propelled industrialization as it was not viable to import manufactured goods from Europe and the USA due to the conflict, leading to local manufacturing and to form a Brazilian intellectual elite.

We observe that to address these two issues in the field of education, the focus was divided into two areas: a basic education, specific to the people, where the priority was literacy and technical education for the industry, and an elitist education for the development and progress of science in Brazil.

The manipulation of social imagination is particularly important in times of political and social change, in moments of redefining collective identities. It was no coincidence that the French Revolution, in its various phases, became a classic example of an attempt to manipulate collective sentiments in the effort to create a new political system, a new society, a new man. Mirabeau stated it clearly: it is not enough to show the truth, it is necessary to make the people love it, it is necessary to seize all this: shape the souls. In 1792, the propaganda section of the Ministry of the Interior had exactly this name: Bureau de l'Esprit (Carvalho, 1990, p. 11).

In the 1891 Constitution, in article 70, it defines who is considered a citizen in Brazilian republican society, "voters are citizens over 21 years old who register in accordance with the law", meaning illiterates were not included in this group. In the view of these liberals/positivists, it was urgent to reduce illiteracy to have a politically maneuverable population segment in elections.

The Benjamin Constant Reform (1890) and six reforms in the 1920s demonstrate how the focus on primary education took time to establish itself in Brazilian political

circles. These include the Sampaio Dória Reform in São Paulo (1921), Carneiro Leão Reforms in Rio de Janeiro (1922-1926) and in Pernambuco (1928 - 1930), Lourenço Filho Reform in Ceará (1922), Góis Calmon Reform in Bahia (1925), Francisco Campos and Mário Casassanta Reform in Minas Gerais (1927), and the Federal District Reform (1928).

### **Benjamin Constant Reform (1890)**

The first educational reform of the Brazilian republic. The objective was to create a new curriculum for basic education; however, it failed to sustain in the long term. This reform had a clearly positivist bias towards education, as it intended to replace the academic curriculum with the encyclopedic curriculum - more practical.

One of the major changes was the inclusion of scientific disciplines at the expense of humanistic disciplines to meet the new requirements of industrial development. The focus of both primary and secondary education, and even higher education, was on subjects such as mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, physics, biology, sociology, and morality. Constant also included trigonometry and physical and natural sciences in the primary school.

In decree no. 981, November 8, 1890, we highlight some characteristics of Benjamin Constant's reform. In article 2 (no. 981, 1890): "primary instruction, free, gratuitous, and lay, will be given in the Federal District in public schools of two categories".

Another highlight is on Moral and Civic Education as a pedagogical practice in article 4 (no. 981, 1890): "moral and civic instruction will not have a distinct course but will constantly and to the highest degree occupy the attention of teachers".

The school model proposed by the Reform was inspired by the European and North American school models that sought to implement popular education. Learning based on experience with reality, in Physics with "[...] elementary notions,

accompanied by simple experiences, of heat, light, electricity, and magnetism," in moral and civic instruction "to constantly make students feel, through direct experience, the greatness of moral laws" (no. 981, 1890).

There was an attempt to establish a more meaningful education that was not based solely on rote memorization. However, the attempt remained in theory, as in practice, the textbook was still at the center of the teaching-learning process.

Regarding teacher training (article 24, no. 981, 1890):

The Government will maintain in the Federal Capital an educational establishment under the name of Pedagogium, intended to offer to the public and especially to teachers the means of instruction they may need, the exposition of the best methods and the most advanced teaching materials (no. 981, 1890).

The Reform maintained the normal schools, "the Government will maintain in the Federal Capital one or more normal schools, according to the needs of education, and each of them will be annexed to a model primary school" (article 12, no. 981, 1890).

## **New School (1920)**

A movement of European and North American educators in the late 19th century, in which there was a different understanding of the needs of childhood. Based on sociological and psychological studies, they questioned the passivity to which the child was condemned by the traditional school.

In Brazil, the most associated name with the movement is Anísio Teixeira, who brought his studies on the philosophy of education of John Dewey. Other important names include Fernando de Azevedo, Lourenço Filho, Jayme Abreu, J. Roberto Moreira, among others.

In 1926, Fernando de Azevedo conducted an Inquiry on Public Education in São Paulo, which resulted in the assessment of the fundamental problems of education



in general and was the basis of a national campaign for a new education policy and the creation of universities. The first section of the Inquiry was about primary and normal education; the second was about technical and professional education; and the third was about secondary and higher education. This Inquiry was commissioned by the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* and revealed the absence of cultural, sociological, or scientific guidelines in primary and normal education, the lack of articulation between educational practice and modern educational theories, and the lack of necessary changes in the teaching staff in the face of pedagogical and methodological innovations. The Inquiry was considered essential for what became known as the Movement of the Pioneers of the New School.

The movement reached its peak with the 1928 reform in the Federal District, promoted by Fernando de Azevedo. However, this conception only spread after 1930, with the publication of the Manifesto in 1932.

Regarding the 1920s, we highlight some educational reforms in primary education that addressed the issue of illiteracy in the country and attempted to implement compulsory and free education in different ways, already presenting characteristics of the New School.

### **Sampaio Dória Reform in São Paulo (1921)**

Antônio Sampaio Dória, as Director of Public Instruction of the State of São Paulo in 1920, had to face a completely deficient primary education system. The number of public schools did not meet the needs of the growing school-age population each year.

His reform focused primarily on the reorganization of primary education. Previously, compulsory schooling started at the age of seven; this reform changed it to nine years old, article no. 9 (1921, no. 3,356) "children aged 9 and 10 years are required to enroll and attend school for free, with enrollment for other ages being

optional in available spots". His intention was to concentrate efforts in a shorter period and gradually achieve the democratization of education.

In other words, the idea was to educate children in two years with daily classes of two and a half hours, article no. 1 (1921, no. 3,356) "primary education, for two years, to be provided in isolated schools, combined schools, and school groups". However, his project failed in the long term.

### **Carneiro Leão Reforme in Rio de Janeiro (1922-1926) and in Pernambuco (1928 - 1930)**

Antônio Arruda Carneiro Leão was an intellectual and author of several books on education. His proposal in Rio de Janeiro was not approved, and in Pernambuco, the reform was carried out as Administrative Act no. 1239/27-12-1928 when he assumed the Secretariat of the Interior, Justice, and Education of Pernambuco in the government of Estácio Coimbra.

Regarding his ideas about Brazilian republican education, Carneiro Leão contributed to the production of the book *À margem da história da República* (1981), and the Justification of his reform was drafted in the document *Organização da educação em Pernambuco* published by the Official Press of the State (1929).

His main criticism was precisely the two aspects created by the republican project: a weak basic school for the working classes under the responsibility of municipalities and states, and the higher education for the elite under the responsibility of the federal government.

[...] and education must be studied here in all its aspects: primary, secondary professional, and higher, because they all correspond to the various mental stages of the classes that present themselves for perfect social functioning (Carneiro Leão, 1981, p. 20).

In the intellectual's view, education needed to be organized in a tripod: moral and civic education, vocational education, and guidance based on scientific criteria. Therefore, popular education should focus on physical education, manual labor, and teacher training. The intellectual argued that "Brazil needs culture. Physical, mental, professional, civic, social, and political culture" (Carneiro Leão, 1981, p. 22).

In line with the principles advocated by the Brazilian Association of Education, Carneiro Leão created the Technical Directorate of Education to direct and guide the state's educational policy. However, with the crisis of 1929 and later the crisis of 1930, the reform was interrupted.

### **Lourenço Filho Reform in Ceará (1922)**

Educator from São Paulo, Lourenço Filho took on the non-commissioned position of Director of Public Instruction of Ceará in 1922 with the challenge of reforming state education. The scenario he encountered was one of extreme precariousness, with semi-literate teachers, few schools, and an illiteracy rate of 80%.

His reform became known as the "Serpa Reform", as the chief executive of that time, Justiniano Serpa, was responsible for the actions through Law No. 1,953 of August 2, 1922. The first action was to select 100 rural schools to apply the methods of city schools. He also reformed the normal course for teacher training and adopted measures such as school inspection, school census, and the implementation of evaluation methods with intelligence tests. Additionally, he implemented compulsory free school attendance for children between 7 and 12 years old and managed to increase enrollment by 10%.

He advocated for technical improvement with rational and scientific principles, but his greatest concern was that students had equal opportunities throughout the country. He believed in the need to unify teaching and evaluation methods.

From the New School perspective, he believed that this method should be based on psychology. In practice, this meant the application of tests - measurement, metric scale, intelligence - with short and objective tests, the use of questionnaires, and the use of psychotechnical resources for career guidance.

Overall, Lourenço Filho's Reform aimed at a Pedagogy with technique. His initiatives were impactful and innovative, however, over time, they lost momentum as they were not in line with the specific demands of the school community and were implemented as a political decision without the involvement of society.

After the First Republic, pedagogue Lourenço Filho will be one of the signatories of the Manifesto of the Pioneers of the New School.

### **Góis Calmon Reform in Bahia (1925)**

Francisco Marques de Góis Calmon, governor of Bahia (1924 – 1928), was considered innovative for appointing young academically trained individuals in his administration, such as Anísio Teixeira, who held the position of Director General of Education.

The Reform defined by Law No. 1,846, of August 14, 1925, specified the principles of free and compulsory education. Regarding these principles, we highlight articles no. 90 and no. 92; "elementary primary education will be free in accordance with the Constitution" (1925b, no. 1,846), and "children aged 7 to 12 years are required to attend school for free" (1925b, no. 1,846).

The goal regarding education in Bahia was to focus on physical, intellectual, and moral education, article no. 1 (1925b, no. 1,846) "Public Education in the State of Bahia aims to educate individuals physically, morally, and intellectually, making them fit for life in society".

Regarding primary education, we highlight article no. 65, which demonstrates the presence of New School principles:

The primary school will be primarily educational, seeking to develop in children the habits of observation and reasoning, arousing their interest in the ideals and achievements of humanity, imparting rudimentary notions of literature and national history, teaching them to handle the Portuguese language as an instrument of thought and expression: guiding their natural activities of eyes and hands through appropriate forms of practical and manual work, finally taking care of their physical development with organized exercises and games and the knowledge of elementary rules of hygiene, always seeking not to forget the land and the environment that the school aims to serve, using all resources to adapt teaching to the particularities of the region and the Bahian environment (1925b, no. 1,846, article no. 65).

Therefore, an education more focused on practice than just theory and geared towards the needs of the time, including manual and technical work and care for the body and hygiene for the development and progress of the country.

### **Francisco Campos and Mário Casassanta Reform in Minas Gerais (1927)**

Francisco Campos assumed the position of Secretary of the Interior (1926), in the state government of Antônio Carlos Ribeiro de Andrada. His Educational Reform was the most significant in the state and had the Inspector General of Public Instruction, Mário Casassanta, involved in formulating Decree 7,970 on October 15, 1927, and Decree 8,162 on January 20, 1928.

They focused their efforts on public education, primarily on the training and qualification of teachers, restructuring the Normal Course. A highlight was the arrival of foreign teachers and the exchange of teachers from Minas Gerais abroad, a teacher exchange program. They created improvement courses using the Education Magazine as a guidance tool and communication channel with teachers in the network of public schools in municipalities. Some of these issues are addressed in the following articles

of Decree No. 10,362, of May 31, 1932, which "approves modifications to the regulations issued with Decrees No. 7,970 of 1927 and 9,450 of 1930":

Art. 166 - To coordinate and systematize the study of drawing in primary education establishments in the Capital, the Secretary of Education will appoint, on commission, a specialist in this field among the public education teachers. This teacher, who will have inspector functions, will:

- a) guide the study of drawing in a didactic sense
- b) organize a plan for standardizing drawing education, submitting this plan for approval to the Inspector General of Education

Art. 39 - Normal school graduates from official schools and equivalent schools from other states and the Federal District, or from foreign schools, may be hired or appointed temporarily for primary education in Minas Gerais in accordance with the regulations (1932, No. 10,362, art. 166 and 39).

Furthermore, the reform addressed all essential issues for the restructuring of primary education, such as the establishment of disciplines, definition of schedules, guidelines for disciplinary compliance, and moral and civic education.

### **Distrito Federal Reform (1928)**

Led by Fernando de Azevedo, the Educational Reform of the Federal District was considered one of the most radical reforms implemented in Brazil. Azevedo was invited to join the government of São Paulo due to his work at the newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo; he assumed the position of Director of Public Instruction of the Federal District on January 17, 1927.

Thus, the "trio of Paulistas" - Washington Luís, Antônio Prado Júnior, and Fernando de Azevedo - came to dictate the course of Rio de Janeiro society in the late 1920s: the first in the Presidency of the

Republic, the second in the mayor's office of Rio de Janeiro, and the last in the educational sphere (Fernando de Azevedo Archive, 2000).

The reform included a large plan for school construction, such as two Normal School buildings and institutions for technical vocational education, primary education, and normal education. It also foresaw the creation of school councils linked to the world of production.

The Normal School program was restructured, extending to five years, divided between a propaedeutic and professional course, and adapting to the dictates of scientific and experimental pedagogy (Fernando de Azevedo Archive, 2000).

To consolidate education methods according to the new pedagogy, educators and public administrators promoted various congresses and conferences throughout Brazil. Furthermore, his reform highlighted the need for greater investments in shaping public opinion favorable to the implementation of a reform policy, as:

Changing the start of school attendance, because it was suspended for the census, and requiring the free work of primary teaching, as teachers served as census takers, the census opened the first major controversy regarding the reform measures of Fernando de Azevedo's project (Fernando de Azevedo Archive, 2000).

Another noteworthy point is that the reform coincided with the celebrations of the first centenary of primary education in Brazil, on October 15, 1827, Dom Pedro I signed the decree formalizing the mandatory establishment of elementary schools in all populous regions of the Empire.

The centenary of primary education sparked various discussions about the Brazilian school system, particularly regarding the issue of illiteracy. Due to a significant portion of the Brazilian population still being illiterate, according to newspaper statistics, after one hundred years of the primary education law, the date should be a cause for national shame rather than celebration (Fernando de Azevedo Archive, 2000).

It can be said that the political figure from Minas Gerais aimed to prepare future generations for the social life of that time.

## **Secondary Education and Higher Education in the First Republic**

In the 1891 Constitution, as the attributions of Congress, Article 35 states: "to create institutions of higher and secondary education in the States and provide secondary education in the Federal District". This demonstrates the republican educational project, focusing on the formation of an intellectual elite. Several political actions were taken in this direction:

a) 1892: José Francisco da Rocha Pombo proposed the creation of the University of Paraná, and Pedro Américo obtained approval to create three universities - in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and the northern region of the country.

b) 1895: Deputies Eduardo Ramos and Paulino de Souza Filho proposed the creation of another university.

c) 1900: Elysio de Carvalho proposed the creation of the Popular University

d) 1909: The University of Manaus was created by private extractivist groups

e) 1912: With the Rivadávia Law, the University of Paraná was founded

f) 1915: Maximiliano Reform

g) 1920: Carlos Maximiliano Pereira dos Santos declared the University of Rio de Janeiro established

We highlight four secondary education reforms directly related to the development of Brazilian higher education, namely: Eptácio Pessoa Code (1901), Rivadávia Corrêa Organic Law (1911), Carlos Maximiliano Reform (1915), and Rocha Vaz Reform (1925).

### **Código Eptácio Pessoa (1901)**



Minister of Justice and Interior Affairs in the Campos Sales government, his focus was on secondary education. Unsuccessfully, he tried to standardize secondary education with the main characteristics: serial system and maintenance/implementation of exams in place of the staggered preparatory exams.

The central point of this reform is the access of women to secondary and higher education (No. 121, 1901): "Enrollment is allowed for individuals of the female sex, for whom there will be separate places in the classrooms".

This measure demonstrates a new perspective on the role of women in society with a more active participation as citizens. A measure that enables transformation through education, schooling, and intellectuality with social and economic impact in the country.

In the category of liberation in Paulo Freire, this represents the possibility for individuals to transform reality and, in this way, free themselves from what is established. "Liberation will not come because science has predetermined it will come. Liberation takes place in History and is realized as a process in which the consciousness of women and men is essential" (Freire, 2001, p. 45).

That is, the subjects themselves enable liberation through social changes, and the first step is the occupation of spaces previously denied to one group or another.

### **Organic Law Rivadavia Corrêa (1911)**

Minister of Justice in the government of Hermes da Fonseca, his law prevailed until 1915, focusing on "free education," that is, without interference from the State. We highlight article 6:

[...] due to the complete didactic autonomy conferred upon them, it is up to the institutes to organize the programs of their courses, with those of Collegio Pedro II being of a practical

nature and freeing themselves from the subordinate condition of being preparatory means for the academies (No. 8,659, 1911).

Rivadavia's law provided a great deal of autonomy in public management but did not keep up with the changes regarding the public right to education as an individual right. In the sense of liberalism, it prioritized the privatization of education, which could not work in the Brazilian reality of a society in which few had the means to finance their own education.

In other words, this change proposed by the law did not work because it did not consider the Brazilian reality of a society with extreme social and economic inequalities.

The critical understanding of the limits of practice has to do with the problem of power, which is class-based and therefore has to do with the question of class struggle and conflict. Understanding the level at which the class struggle is situated in a given society is indispensable for demarcating the spaces, the contents of education, the historically possible, and therefore the limits of political-educational practice (Freire, 2001, p. 25).

Considering the category of power in Paulo Freire, we understand this change as an even greater concentration of social and economic power in a specific group, causing greater inequalities in the country.

### **Carlos Maximiliano Reform (1915)**

Carlos Maximiliano was Minister of Justice in the government of Venceslau Brás, and his reform was important in reestablishing the role and responsibility of the State in Brazilian education. Article No. 1 claims that:

The Federal Government will continue to maintain the six institutes of secondary and higher education subordinate to the Ministry of

Justice and Interior Affairs, granting them didactic and administrative autonomy in accordance with the provisions of this decree (No. 11,530, 1915).

From a Freirian perspective, the State's role in education is essential as the maintainer of educational institutions, as political and governmental actions are necessary for the development of a country's education.

However, in practice, the reform does not favor the autonomy of the school with democratic administration, as the administrative structures only enable authoritarian and hierarchical power. From the Secretary to the immediate directors, and from them to the department heads who, in turn, extend orders to the schools.

The process of developing Brazilian education is also a political struggle. In other words, each reform represents its historical time, political interests, and power struggles.

"Finally, there is no neutral education, nor is there any quality for which to strive in the sense of reorienting education that does not imply a political choice and does not require a decision, also political, to materialize it" (Freire, 2001, p. 24). Therefore, the Maximiliano Reform reveals the political interest in developing Brazilian higher education for the formation of a Brazilian intellectual elite.

### **Rocha Vaz Reform (1925)**

Rocha Vaz was a professor at the Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro, and his name was given to the reform that took place during João Luís Alves' tenure in the Ministry of Justice and Interior Affairs, in the government of Artur Bernardes. This was the last reform regarding secondary education in the First Republic.

The main action of the reform was the moralization of education, including the discipline of "moral and civic" as mandatory in schools, thus completely removing the didactic and administrative autonomy of the schools. We highlight article No. 55 (No.

16,782-A, 1925a): "the entrance examination, mandatory in all secondary education courses, shall consist of the following subjects: concrete notions, markedly objective, of moral and civic instruction, [...]".

This discipline aimed at building a republican society based on order, patriotism, and nationalism. Considering the profile of Brazilian society marked by slavery, predominantly rural and hierarchical, moral and civic education therefore valued the appreciation of work, respect for laws and codes of conduct, bodily and mental hygiene, discipline, and respect for hierarchy.

In this way, the aim was to create a new society, a new culture focused on the formation of cheap labor for a necessary working class for the future industry.

The way the City is treated by its inhabitants, by its rulers. The City is also us, our culture, which, gestating in it, in the body of its traditions, makes and remakes us. We form the City and are formed by it (Freire, 2001, p. 14).

From a Freirean perspective, every individual is shaped by culture, and thus, society is culture depending on its space and time, and changing according to the needs and political interests involved.

The reform also fixed the curriculum of higher education and improved the entrance exam, "the certificate of final approval for the 5th year of secondary education is an indispensable condition for admission to the entrance exam for enrollment in any higher education course, with the staggered preparatory exams being eliminated" (No. 16,782-A, 1925a). Also, regarding the entrance exam, the decree determines that "the entrance exam will include a written test, an oral test, and a practical test" (No. 16,782-A, 1925a). This created a culture of entrance exams with education geared towards the need to pass a test to secure a spot where there is not enough space for everyone. It is a selective process that maintains the most "capable," a social Darwinism, to form the ruling class.

## **A Republic Educational Project**

After analyzing the educational reforms that marked the changes in primary, secondary, and higher education, from a Freirean perspective, we can understand what the republican educational project of this period was. As we have demonstrated throughout the article, this project has two central issues related to education. The first is related to the type of education that would be given to the people, and the second is the formation of a Brazilian intellectual elite, essentially those who would make up the leading intellectual class of the ruling elite.

The second issue was more worked on in the early years of the First Republic, as we can see from the dates of the reforms and their changes in education. Universities were built, and secondary education underwent several changes aimed at increasingly preparing people for higher or technical education.

While primary education lagged behind for many years, gaining greater political attention in the 1920s. In primary education, a very strong change was the creation of symbols and rituals to represent love for the homeland.

Another key element to be observed in the project of the republican primary school concerns the role assumed by this institution in shaping character and developing moral virtues, patriotic sentiments, and discipline in children. Messages of a moralizing and civic nature were widely propagated by the public primary school, through various forms, such as the presence of patriotic symbols in the daily life of the school and in festive situations, the linking of school time to the civic calendar, prescribed readings for students, among others. This civilizing bias was directed at an internal audience within the school, mainly consisting of students and families, and extended beyond the school walls to reach society as a whole (Schueler and Magaldi, 2008, p. 14).

Teachings aimed at forming the republican imaginary in the people also construct a hegemonic culture, which, from a Freirean perspective, creates an ideology.

It is not the discriminated culture that generates discriminatory ideology, but the hegemonic culture that does so. The discriminated culture engenders the ideology of resistance, which, based on its experience of struggle, sometimes explains forms of behavior that are more or less peaceful, sometimes rebellious, more or less indiscriminately violent, sometimes critically aimed at the recreation of the world. An important point to emphasize: to the extent that the relationships between these ideologies are dialectical, they interpenetrate. They do not exist in a pure state and can change from person to person [...] (Freire, 2001, p. 18).

The literacy of the people was the great problem to be solved and continued to be so even after the First Republic. Another aspect of educating the people was the need for instruction for work in industry, as it was developing in the country.

That said, the political regime was focused on the idea of liberalism. There was a search for greater autonomy/freedom from the State, which was demonstrated in education by the separation between church and school. A secular state, a secular education.

The peak of liberalism in Brazil coincided with the decline of the monarchical regime, undermined at its foundations by a series of factors. The struggle waged at the end of the Empire (BARROS, 1959, COSTA, 1956; FREYRE, 1959, T. 2nd, p. 515s) - which resulted in the installation of the republican regime - marked an ideological position that gradually led to the displacement of Catholicism from the privileged position it had held. With the Republic, liberal ideas triumphed. From the standpoint of the history of Catholicism in Brazil, the regalist and civil phase came to an end. Indeed, Decree 119-A, of January 7, 1890, determined the separation of Church and State, confirmed by the Constitution of 1891. A new phase was inaugurated, in which another position would be necessary (Nagle, 2001, p. 82).

The decisions of liberal policies in the republican regime mark a moment in the history of Brazil, which represents a certain freedom of Brazilian society.

[...] History is a time of possibility and not of determinations. And if it is a time of possibilities, the first consequence that comes to light is that history not only is but also demands freedom (Freire, 2001, p. 19).

Initially, the freedom preached with the implementation of the Republic was associated with the discourse of forming a politically active people in the country, as explained by Carvalho (1987):

It was the implementation of a system of government that proposed, exactly, to bring the people to the forefront of political activity. The Republic, in the words of its most radical propagandists, such as Silva Jardim and Lopes Trovão, was presented as the eruption of the people into politics (Carvalho, 1987, p. 11).

However, this is not exactly what happened in this period. There was a concern with the literacy of the people so that more people could vote in elections, basically as a tool of the so-called "colonels" - oligarchs -, but history reveals that this concern was related to maintaining the political and social *status quo*, and not to an education that raises awareness and critical thinking among the people.

## **Final Considerations**

After analyzing the educational reforms in basic and higher education carried out during the First Republic, we return to the central question of this article: did these reforms aim for social transformation in Brazil and the country's economic development? When we raise the question of economic development, we think of it in the sense given by Celso Furtado (1961): social production and its equitable distribution in society.

This is the guiding question of the article, because from a Freirean perspective, it is not possible to transform the education of a people without also promoting social change in the country. Therefore, we conclude that all the educational reforms of the First Republic failed to be sustained and truly achieve objectives such as free,

compulsory education, and mass literacy because they did not align with the social needs of the period, in other words, there was no social change.

As we have demonstrated throughout the article, these reforms were inspired by European and North American models, but often were not adapted to the Brazilian reality. Furthermore, the great concern with the construction of higher education for the Brazilian elite fell short of efforts for quality basic education for the people for many years. It was only from the 1920s that political efforts focused more on public primary education, but the precariousness of all public education in the country was already very significant.

This period was marked by three concepts: nationalism, liberalism, and positivism. The “isms” of the Brazilian Republican Project that determined the course of education for the Brazilian people and the formation of republican subjects capable of living in society as citizens.

Nationalism aimed at building a republican imaginary in the people, as Carvalho (1990, p. 11) explains: “the manipulation of social imagination is particularly important in moments of political and social change, in moments of redefinition of collective identities”. This characteristic was identified in the reforms with the implementation of moral and civic discipline. Liberalism was present in the idea of a secular state, hence a secular education at least in public education. And positivism aimed at an education centered on science and a society focused on order and progress. Characteristics of the republican project that met the needs of the time, especially with the country’s industrial development and the literacy of the people to exercise political rights as citizens, such as the right to vote.

Thus, the article demonstrates that other perspectives of theoretical and methodological reference are possible to be applied, allowing the necessary reading of the world, as Freire proposed through a critical awareness of reality. This path constitutes a Freirean reference.



This article also highlights the multiplicity and fragility of successive educational reforms in Brazil, historically driven by individuals rather than collective political projects. The political power dynamics were very unstable at the time, leading to reforms, sometimes with significant social and emancipatory ambitions, but more often reforms in service of the hegemonic economic and political forces of Brazilian society.

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