Argentinian students force university reforms, 1918

December 1917 to October 1918

Country: Argentina
Location City/State/Province: Cordoba, Buenos Aires

Goals:
The students demanded university autonomy, the right of all university parties to participate in election of university professors, curricula modernization, that university education be available and affordable for all, and secularization of universities.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 062. Student strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 062. Student strike
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 117. General strike

Classifications

Classification:
Change

Cluster:
Democracy
Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Federación Universitaria de Córdoba, Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires, Federación Universitaria de Argentina, Federación Universitaria de La Plata

Partners:
Labor unions and workers

External allies:
None known

Involvement of social elites:
None known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires
- Federación Universitaria de Córdoba
- Federación Universitaria de La Plata

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Córdoba labor unions
- labor

Segment Length: Approximately 7 weeks

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
University administration, Yrigoyen's regime

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
None known
Increased prosperity and the expansion of electoral rights at the turn of the century in Argentina precipitated significant growth in the middle class, a population shift with the majority now living in urban centers, and broader enrollment in universities, as newly prosperous families were able to send their children into higher education. The universal suffrage law of 1912 (granted to men over 18) was first applied in 1916, when Hipolito Yrigoyen of the Radical Party was elected with support from the middle and working class.

Between 1916 and 1918, students and young graduates pushed for educational reforms at the National Universidad de Córdoba, considered to be one of the more conservative universities at the time. They were led by recent Córdoba graduate Deodoro Roca and intellectuals such as Arturo Orgaz, Saul Alejandro Taborda, and Arturo Capdevila, who founded journals to introduce new ideas, established discussion groups, and organized public lectures. In one example, the group Atenuo Universitario, founded in 1914 and including students and professors largely from the University of Buenos Aires, established the bimonthly journal “Ideas”, which dealt with contemporary problems and frequently championed education reforms. Gabriel del Mazo and Hiram Pozzo, two students active in the reform movement, were members of Atenuo. Del Mazo served in the Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires (FUBA), and Pozzo was President of the Federación Universitaria de Córdoba (FUC) during the reform campaign.

In December 1917, the University of Córdoba refused to concede to student demands that they reopen a boardinghouse for medical students close by the school. When students affiliated with the FUC returned for the school year in March 1918 to demand a reply, they were again rebuffed. In response, students called for a mass protest on March 31. They refused to attend school, hosting a demonstration on school grounds where they handed out informational pamphlets. They also contacted local politicians, labor groups, and student organizations for assistance. Their primary goals were to secularize and democratize Córdoba University by expanding student and professor participation in its administration and modernizing the curricula. They also wanted to make university education available and affordable by lifting entrance restrictions and establishing greater flexibility in attendance and examinations to accommodate low and middle-income students with work obligations. In response, the Consejo Superior, or Supreme Council of the University, closed its doors to students and planned to disregard any student requests.

The three Federaciones of Córdoba, Buenos Aires, and La Plata established a national Federación Universitaria de Argentina (FUA) to coordinate efforts between the three student-led groups on April 11. After receiving student leaders from the FUA, President Yrigoyen declared the need for an intervention, and appointed a state official, Dr. Nicholas Matienzo, to redesign the university structure, establishing a new University Assembly on May 31. They elected new deans for the three colleges, all of whom appeared to have strong Radical Party affiliations, and a new chancellor, Dr. Antonio Nores. As a member of an elite association for Catholic men, Nores offended students, who rejected his nomination and flooded his coronation on June 15 to
protest and disrupt the event, although Nores was still able to assume the chancellorship on the 17th.

On June 21, the FUC called for Nores’s resignation and published the Manifesto Liminar, detailing their argument to modernize the outdated university structure. The piece, edited by Roca, insisted that increasing student participation in the assembly was vital. The first National Student Congress, organized by the FUA, held its first session one month later, on July 21, advocating autonomy and contesting the regime’s attempt to control the reform process. Conceding to pressure, Nores resigned.

Protests continued through October. In early September, several labor groups in Córdoba prominently organized with students, calling a general strike. The FUC criticized the capitalist economic system to show their support for the labor unions that were aiding the student movement. They also sent two representatives to assist the striking workers. Two leaders of the Federación were arrested by police for inciting workers to armed revolt, prompting labor groups across the country to rise up in protest. On September 5, local Córdoba labor leaders announced that they had willingly accepted backing by the Federación.

In October 1918, President Yrigoyen conceded to the students’ demands, issuing an executive decree approving the introduction of a student reform program at Córdoba in which students could be elected representatives in the university’s administrative councils and influence school policy. In addition, the program made class attendance optional, eased restrictions on educational materials, and permitted greater flexibility in examination procedures. Yrigoyen and his party received much of the credit for these extensive reforms. The same reforms were extended to the university of Buenos Aires and La Plata, in addition to the University of Santa Fe and Tucumen (established in 1919 and 1921, respectively). The university reform movement in Argentina influenced university reform campaigns in Uruguay, Chile, and Peru, among others.

Research Notes

Influences:

The 1918 Argentina University Reforms would influence university reforms across Latin America. (2)

Sources:

http://www.unc.edu.ar/institucional/historia/reforma/cronologia


Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Susana Medeiros, 15/10/2012

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.
Copyright Swarthmore College.