

THE SCHOOL AREA UNDER PERONISM (1946-1955)

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ABSTRACT

This work studies the impact of the emergence of the Peronist regime in school life. It shows that the school experienced important reforms and transformations in those years, the implementation of which was limited by a highly conflictive context. The article argues that the school community reacted in varied ways to the new political movement. The political use of education by Perón was also conditioned by that conflict, as educational institutions were the backdrop of a conflict that shook Argentine society as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the government of Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955) used school for political ends on assigning to it a campaign to reach consensus. First, Peronism notably expanded its outreach—that is, access to it was democratized—and centralized its administration, and later it introduced innovations in teaching contents positively depicting the regime.² Parallel to these transformations, literature points out that teachers' unions were positioned predominantly against Peronism and that the Government harassed disaffected teachers in a number of ways.³ Bibliography describes summary investigations, suspensions and transfers as a

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² These reforms have been thoroughly studied by historiography. See: Mariano Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Ariel, 1993); Maria Rein y Raanan Rein, "Populismo y educación: el caso peronista", *Ciencias de la Educación*, V: No. 8 (1996): 50-57; Juan Carlos Tedesco, "La educación argentina entre 1930 y 1955", in: *Primera historia integral* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1980); Silvina Gvirtz, "La politización de los contenidos escolares y la respuesta de los docentes primarios 1949-1955", in: *El primer peronismo*, eds. Raanan Rein y Sitman Rosalie (Buenos Aires: Lumiere, 2005), 37 -56.

³ Puigrós and Bernetti allege that "until the late 1940s, important sectors of the teaching profession held an ambiguous position, showing both expectations and *disagreement* with the new form the Government acquires". See: Adriana Puigrós and Jorge Luis Bernetti, "Los discursos de los docentes y la organización del campo profesional", in *Peronismo: cultura política y educación (1945-1955)*, eds. Adriana Puigrós (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1993), 197. Ezequiel Adamovsky also points out that teachers were rather "reactive" to Peronism and that relationships turned more "turbulent" after the second presidency; however, a few pages later he shows certain diversity in the teacher unions' positions toward Peronism, enumerating—in a footnote on page 290—the unions within the teaching sector that supported Perón. See: Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 2009), 259, 290 and 302.

common feature of those times, and several press articles show claims by teachers regarding ideological and union contents. This would indicate an unstable and contradictory situation: the existence of a Government that calls on an opposing sector —the teachers'— as a sort of propagator or political intermediary. This ambiguous and uncertain context makes us question about daily life at school during those years, of which we know very little. How did the *school community* experience the emergence of Peronism and such a direct intrusion of politics on its daily activities and dynamics when those who were responsible for supporting the campaign in favour of Peronism were actually on the opposing side? Is the classification of teachers as an opposing sector really an appropriate description? How did the transformations being experienced by the Argentine society during those years manifested in school life?

This paper attempts to shed light on these questions. To answer them, this work relies on several sources, especially on a random sample of summary investigations initiated in those years against school teachers reporting to the National Education Council. This article seeks to move away from both binary interpretations —placing the school or any of its members at one side or the other of the political spectrum— and the conceptions exclusively based on educational policies. Instead, this article proposes to observe the way in which school life dynamics were affected by the emergence of Peronism. The first section describes the reforms introduced by Peronism in the educational area. The following section analyzes summary investigations and discusses their meaning.⁴ The third section analyzes the after-1952 period, when the campaign to spread Peronism through school began. This article shows how school also became the setting for the conflicts affecting Argentine society and how reforms introduced by Peronism in the educational area gave rise to several processes which were not always in harmony with Government intentions.

1. The Educational Field and Peronism

The arrival in government of Peronism in 1946 brought about concrete changes in the dynamics of the public education system since it involved the reform of long-standing entities and laws, and a significant increase in the number of students and schools. Among the most revealing modifications, we should point out the creation of the Secretariat of Education in 1948, which in 1949 —with the enactment of the Ministries Charter— became the *Ministry of Education*. This reform entailed the conversion of the National Education Council (CNE, for its Spanish acronym) into the General Department of Primary Education. As from its creation in 1884, the National Education Council had exercised its powers rather discretionally: it had its own budget, it had jurisdiction over the schools of the Federal Capital and the National Territories, and it was responsible for administering the funds assigned to provinces

⁴ Summary investigations account for several issues at the same time, and they may be analyzed based on several questions. Among other things, these summary investigations show forms, mechanisms and instances of interaction between the Government and the civil society, reveal roadmaps of power in the domestic world and let us glimpse the school and the teacher's position in the society at that time. I have thoroughly analyzed these summary investigations in another study; here, I am interested in concentrating on their meaning in the light of the two previously mentioned questions. See: Flavia Fiorucci, "*La denuncia bajo el peronismo: el caso del campo escolar*" (Buenos Aires: in press).

for the promotion of Primary Education⁵. Specifically, the creation of the Department of Primary Education meant the suppression of the functional and financial autonomy of the Council, which was now subject to the minister's authority. The reform of the educational bureaucracy was justified by governmental propaganda on the need to overcome "the unjustified divorce and the anarchy existing among the different areas of learning" and was based on a whole new state order seeking to strengthen the centralization of public policies⁶.

There was a remarkable expansion of the educational system during the period known as "First Peronism". Although the Argentine Government had purported, as from the passing of Act No. 1420 in 1884, to ease access to education for the whole social body, statistics showed an illiteracy rate which even in 1943 reached 15% of the population. This figure, although low in the context of the time, concealed a more precarious situation. School abandonment was very high. According to the 1947 census, every 1,000 people above 15 years of age who had only attended primary studies, just 226 had finished that cycle⁷. To balance that situation, and in line with a Government which had set social democratization as a cardinal goal, according to official statistics during the first presidency of Perón —the period where all public works of the Peronism concentrated— 1069 schools, 1064 kindergarten sections and 6071 new classrooms were opened⁸. Furthermore, programs of home schooling and education for children who could not attend school institutions on account of physical disabilities were created⁹. Additionally, national schools established in the provinces which only offered courses until fourth grade were extended so as to cover the whole obligatory cycle (that is, until sixth grade).

Hand in hand with these innovations of a more material nature, the Government progressively developed transformations associated with the system of values governing public education. The process started with the institutionalization of a change that had been introduced by the military Government taking power in June 1943. In 1947, the Peronism enacted the military Executive Order passed in 1943 which had introduced religious education in public schools, a measure which —as it is already known— altered one of the fundamental principles of the national educational system: *laicism*¹⁰. The following period of changes at the level of

⁵ On the functioning of the National Education Council, see: República Argentina, Consejo Nacional de Educación, *Cincuentenario de la ley 1420 Book II* (Buenos Aires: Consejo Nacional de Educación, 1934).

⁶ Ministerio de Educación de la Nación, *Labor desarrollada durante la primera presidencia del general Juan Perón* (Buenos Aires: 1952). Regarding the changes in public policy management and state bureaucracy during Peronism, see: Patricia M. Berrotarán, *Del plan a la planificación. El estado durante la época peronista* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2003), 87.

⁷ Héctor P. Agosti, "El desarrollo cultural-escolar" in *Nación y cultura* (Buenos Aires, Sociedad y Cultura: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1982), 85.

⁸ Regarding the promise of democratization of social welfare, see: Elisa Pastoriza and Juan Carlos Torre, "La democratización del bienestar en los años peronistas", *Los años peronistas*, Tomo VIII, *Nueva historia argentina eds.* Juan Carlos Torre (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2002), 257-312.

⁹ On improvements in primary education, see: Ministerio de Educación de la Nación, *Labor desarrollada durante la primera presidencia del general Juan Perón* (Buenos Aires: 1952), 7-8.

¹⁰ The introduction of Catholic education exceeded the school environment. It had to do with a system of alliances Perón had entered into to reach the presidency. As it is publicly known, this executive order, besides encountering resistance and criticism by the anti-Peronist opposition, also caused strong unease among some sectors of Peronism. Twenty-one majority Deputies refused to attend the

symbolism occurred after the passing of the Second Five-Year Plan in 1952. The Plan, which declared the Peronist dogma as *National Doctrine*, stated the express will to modify the school curricula and especially textbooks in order to include the principles of the new political ideology¹¹. That is, as from 1952 school was conceived, and shortly afterwards used, by the political power as an instrument to spread the Peronist party's ideology. As a whole, the introduced innovations —both regarding the administration and the extension of the school's scope— implied that the new political movement gave the school an essential role in its project. The question arises, ¿then, as to how the school area as a whole lived the emergence of this new experience and the changes it introduced?.

The accession of Perón to power resulted in a reordering (at least at the level of symbolism) of categories and social divisions. Peronism largely nurtured from the support of the most humble segments and, through its public rhetoric, it granted to workers an unprecedented level of protagonism in social and political life. It also exalted their lifestyles and reasserted the status of sectors which had so far been deemed subordinate¹². Terms considered derogative and humiliating to designate the working class —the most known case was the term *descamisado* (shirtless)— had a radical change of appreciation¹³. This subversion of the accepted forms of the social hierarchy and authority was accompanied by high levels of conflict, which divided society into irreconcilable identities and groups: Peronists versus anti-Peronists. This bipolar conflict permeated all fields of public life. Stereotypes invoked in those days by members of the middle and high sectors to refer to Peronists, such as “*cabecita negra*” (little black head) reveal the anxiety of these sectors in view of what they perceived to be a social “levelling” process¹⁴. The school —although showing specific institutional dynamics— was not alien to this process. The rise of Peronism entailed strong disagreements in school life, not only because it legislated on it, but also because society as a whole was in ferment. At schools, the existence of conflicts is evidenced by the high number of summary investigations in which the Peronism was a central part¹⁵.

session scheduled to debate the passing of the *Catholic education Act*, which had already been approved by the Senate, and seven Deputies of the Labour Party walked out of Parliament before voting. See: Roberto Di Stéfano, *Ovejas negras* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana), 340.

¹¹ A Curriculum Review Committee organized in 1948 proposed new school programmes which were implemented as from 1949. These programmes introduced some innovative elements, such as teachings on the importance of saving, and laid emphasis on patriotic contents, but did not seek to spread purely political-partisan messages. See: Miguel Somoza, *Educación y política en Argentina (1946-1955)*, eds. Miño y Dávila (Madrid: 2006), 138-171.

¹² The pioneer work analyzing how Peronism altered social hierarchies is Daniel James' study, the observations of which are still valid. Daniel James, *Resistencia e integración* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1990), 47.

¹³ James, “*Resistencia*”, 47.

¹⁴ In a very interesting study, Natalia Milanesio holds that anti-Peronist stereotypes and descriptions of the sectors that supported Perón were a response to a process which they perceived as a threat to their class identities, lifestyles and social status. See: Natalia Milanesio, “Peronists and cabecitas” in *The New Cultural History of Peronism*, eds. Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa (Durham: University Press, 2010), 55.

¹⁵ I have refrained from using figures and percentages because this summary investigation is based on a random sample and the Registry authorities do not know if the filed summary investigations make up the whole number of initiated proceedings.

2. Summary Investigations during Peronism

Summary investigations used to (and still do) constitute the device applied by the educational bureaucracy to sanction teachers breaching the roles assigned to them. There were different mechanisms to bring a summary investigation. It may be initiated *ex officio* by the authorities, or as a result of a complaint¹⁶. According to the regulations in force, a complaint could be filed “by any capable person who is not absolutely disqualified” before the school head office, the sectional inspection offices of the provinces and territories and their branches; however, only the National Education Council or its president, the School Councils and the General Inspection Offices of the Provinces or Territories may initiate the prosecution. In the case of CNE employees and teachers, the bringing of the complaint “was *compulsory*, and failing to file it was deemed a serious offense”¹⁷.

When analyzing summary investigations during the first Peronism period filed in the Intermediate Archive, the recurrence of accusations of *anti-Peronism* against members of the school community can be observed¹⁸. Accusations came from different sources: teachers, principals, local officers, neighbours and parents. They were based on grounds having different levels of seriousness. The first summary investigation was brought in February 1946 in the middle of the election campaign. The proceeding was initiated when the authorities of the Labour Party in Salta sent a telegram to the CNE informing that Inspector José Arce harangued the teaching staff against Perón and in favour of the UCR political party¹⁹. Accusations of this kind against employees of the CNE would be recurrent in the following years. There have been numerous administrative proceedings initiated as a result of an accusation of anti-Peronist militancy by a teacher, inspector or school principal. A case similar to Arce’s is the accusation brought in July 1947 by the former president of Peronism of the Arroyito (Córdoba) circuit, who accused the principal of Federal School No. 347 of the area of being “determined to disparaging and sabotaging the work of the National Revolution”, encouraging “settlers and labourers not to abide by the laws and not to collaborate in any way with the Government’s work” on affirming that Perón would only bring “impoverishment and hunger” to them²⁰.

The charges giving rise to the opening of the summary investigations also brought up even more trivial issues. This is the case of the complaint filed by a teacher against his school’s principal who, on observing the draft of a class on railways, reproached the teacher for “exalting the figure of Perón, who acted as a

¹⁶ The Rules of Procedure of the National Education Council mentioned, among other grounds for the opening of a summary proceeding: a criminal, immoral or improper behaviour, the breach of the laws and the rules of procedure, the inability to keep order and discipline, and the fact of becoming outdated in the professional art and science.

¹⁷ The regulation of summary proceedings may be checked at the above-mentioned CNE publication. República Argentina, “*Cincuentenario*”, 768.

¹⁸ It should be pointed out that the authorities of the National Intermediate Archive —where proceedings are deposited— are unsure of whether the whole number of documents produced by the CNE during those years are kept in their files. For example, it is especially noticeable that the summary proceedings of the year 1953 consist of only a few dozen files, whereas there are long lines of files for the other years.

¹⁹ File No. 32,391. In all these cases, I have modified the names to preserve the privacy of all the persons involved.

²⁰ File No. 34,266.

dictator in all aspects of life”²¹. In similar circumstances, the teacher Mercedes Vigna, who worked at School No. 50 of Comodoro Rivadavia, sent a communication to the CNE in October 1946 accusing the principal of the school where she worked of asking her to correct a speech praising Perón”. According to Vigna, the principal reproached her for “doing politics at school”, and reminded her that it was forbidden to do so²².

The most inextricable summary investigations were those combining political issues with accusations regarding honour and morality. Among them, the summary investigation brought against the principal of Outdoor School No. 8 is particularly noteworthy.²³ In 1946, she was accused by the hygiene inspector of having an affair with another female teacher. On account of the seriousness of the accusation, a summary investigation was immediately initiated, the institution was intervened and the principal was removed from office until the charges were clarified. Even though in this case the initial accusation did not make any reference to the teacher's anti-Peronism, the summary investigation was not alien to the conflict which pervaded the Argentine society. In a long report, the controller pointed out that in the institution in charge of the accused principal “discussions against General Perón and his works occurred unashamedly, *disowning every teacher's primary obligation, which is to act with moderation when expressing his or her opinions on people and facts*”. According to the report sent to the Council, the maids were the only sector that did not take part in the anti-Peronist complot, and they were badly treated on account of their Peronist political identity. The controller introduced himself as a Government delegate whose duty was to implement at school “*the rules of humanity, social welfare and defence of the underprivileged that constitute[d] the base and foundation of the Argentine president's policy*”. The report had reminiscences of the Peronist discursive universe: the maids, described as “humble, supportive, selfless, obedient and respectful”, were opposed to the figure of the anti-Peronist and amoral principal. In 1957, the teacher accused of homosexuality requested a review of her file, and presented herself as a victim of “a dangerous [person] supporting the dictatorship, and an official informer”, who had sentenced her for expressing her ideas against Peronism at school.

Clearly, those who bring these accusations before the CNE do so because they believe that anti-Peronism is deemed by the authorities *an offense* which should be sanctioned. This doesn't mean that all the accusers were Peronist militants uninterestedly alerting public powers of their enemies. On the contrary, as it can be deducted from several summary investigations, many accusations arise from conflicts which exceed the political issue. An illustrative example in this respect is what

²¹ File No. 23,766.

²² File No. 3,728.

²³ I have thoroughly analyzed this summary proceeding in Flavia Fiorucci (in press): “Los amores de la maestra: sexualidad, moralidad y clase durante el peronismo”. The inspector had to “*check the sight, ears and mouth of first-grade children, apply the vaccination against diphtheria to students authorized by their parents; and assist the doctor in the district's consulting room*”. With Peronism, this body, which reported to the Ministry of Justice and Public Instruction, became a part of the Ministry of Public Health. See: Stella Maris Cornelis, “Control y generación de los cuerpos durante el peronismo: La educación física como transmisora de valores en el ámbito escolar (1946-1955)”. *Revista Aljaba* Vol. 9 (2009): 105-121. Available in (2005) http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S166957042005000100006&lng=es&nrm=iso.

happened in 1948 with the principal of School No. 39 of the Territory of La Pampa.²⁴ He was accused by the father of a student of several offenses which involved ideological and partisan aspects. He was accused of “being a socialist militant”; “describing the National Representative Sanmartino as ‘talented’ for his expression ‘*aluvión zoológico*’ (zoological flood)”, reading *La Vanguardia*, harassing the only Peronist teacher in the school and, furthermore, being “a vicious person, who had been seen in underworld facilities *in a small town having one thousand inhabitants where* —as the document sent to the CNE stated— *everything was known*”. The accusation was disregarded in the summary investigation as it was shown that the person signing the accusation was illiterate.

Its author was another educator, the husband of the teacher who was allegedly harassed by the principal. The charge filed by a group of parents against the principal of a rural school of the Province of Jujuy, who alleged that their children were poorly treated for being Peronists, was also disallowed by the inspector after finding out that several signatures had been forged. Class resentments and disagreements involving the principal’s husband underlay the accusation. The text of the accusation filed by the parents before the Educational Council is transparent regarding its underlying reasons. The document stated that “the principal’s husband” worked as an accountant for “one of the most important English companies in the Northern area where, in all labour conflicts, he defends his employers even if the worker is right”.²⁵ Several parents signing the accusation worked for this company.

As it can be deduced in the last two cases, summary investigations followed unpredictable paths. Accusing somebody of being anti-Peronist did not guarantee a sanction. Even though it is true that the educational bureaucracy reacted to the most trivial and improbable plots, as I have shown in another study, it has also investigated, followed the institutional proceedings and specifically avoided punishing members of the school community having a good reputation in their environment. In certain cases, the accusers were even sanctioned for making up charges or placing the community’s harmony at stake. The principal who in Santiago del Estero accused a teacher at her school of refraining from inviting the neighbourhood to an homage to Eva Perón received a warning from the Council for unfairly treating her staff. However, some teachers were undoubtedly subject to retaliations for accusations related to their anti-Peronist political position. The vice-principal of a rural school in Concepción de la Sierra, Misiones, was accused of being a radical and a communist, and was transferred to another school to avoid inconveniences, despite the summary investigation could not determine the truthfulness of the charges²⁶.

What do summary investigations tell us about the relationship between Peronism and the educational area? Summary investigations evidence the heterogeneity of positions on Peronism among teachers. They point out that there were sectors that *opposed Peronism*, even accepting that not all accusations were true. At the same time, they trim a sector of the educational field that *supports the new political movement* and considers (based on belief or opportunism) that the adoption of this identity authorizes them to disparage others. The image of a *Government*

²⁴ File No. 27,424.

²⁵ File No. 16,200.

²⁶ I have analyzed these summary proceedings in detail, especially the meaning of accusations under Peronism, in Flavia Fiorucci, “*La denuncia bajo el peronismo. El caso del campo escolar*”, (in press).

receptive to these plots, a regime which will rule in favour of those defending and protecting it, clearly lies behind each of the accusations against anti-Peronists. Furthermore, as we have already seen, not all accusations came from public officers, which allow us to glimpse *an effervescent and conflictive situation* surpassing and exceeding school. These conflicts reflect the tensions swamping the most micro sociability under Peronism: the neighbourhood and the neighbours'. That is, as from its early days Peronism *raised divisions, breaks and conflicts* in the school community and its surroundings. These divisions not only affected the relationships among teachers, but also those with their superiors and between the school staff and their neighbours. Therefore, the description of the relationship between Peronism and the educational area may not be reduced to a positive or a negative reception. The school experienced with distinct features the conflict that affected society as a whole.

3. Teachers and the Peronization of Educational Contents

As it has been mentioned in numerous studies, the Peronist Government progressively adjusted the mechanisms for the control and indoctrination of civil society, especially as from Perón's second presidency.²⁷ The Government assigned to the school a very special role in this stage, seeking to use it as a mechanism to generate more support and consensus²⁸. The statement of the Second Five-Year Plan on the content of school books—which provided that they should be adapted to the National Doctrine—resulted in the production of new manuals. Texts drawn up after 1952 had specific references to official public works and to the figures of Eva and Perón, and positively described the social transformations introduced by the new Government. For example, they emphasized the presence of workers, as opposed to oligarchy. This *political-partisan* use of educational contents was unprecedented in national history. Even though it is known that education prior to Perón was not politically neutral—it was used to propagate civic and patriotic ideals—, never before had it been used as a means of spreading specific partisan propositions. This operation (spreading Peronism through school) clearly entailed the teachers' collaboration and, therefore, involved a specific vision by these governmental agents. A document published by the Ministry of Education to explain the educational objectives of the Second Five-Year Plan declared in this respect that although abiding with the national doctrine was “an obligation for all Argentines”, “this obligation rested more heavily on teachers” since, as this brochure stated, they were in charge of “bringing up population”²⁹.

Perón stated more than once the need for the teachers' help to guarantee the spreading of his ideals. In a contradictory message in the opening of the 1953 school

²⁷ In the political spectrum, pressure on the opposition materialized through a series of institutional transformations beginning with the enactment of the Constitution in 1949, which introduced the possibility to re-elect the president; the reform to the Political Parties Charter in the same year and the Electoral Act in 1951. Among other provisions, the new charter prohibited the creation of coalitions and the Electoral Act introduced the mechanism of the single-seat constituency system which favoured Peronism. See: Marcela García Sebastiani, *Los antiperonistas en la Argentina peronista, radicales y socialistas en la política argentina entre 1943 y 1951* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2005), 67.

²⁸ On this topic, see: Mariano Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Ariel, 1993), 45.

²⁹ Cited in Ministerio de Educación de la Nación, *La educación en el Segundo Plan Quinquenal*, (Buenos Aires: Ministry of Education, 1953), 7, cited by Miguel Somoza, *Educación y política en Argentina (1946-1955)*, eds. Miño y Dávila, (Madrid, 2006): 127.

year, he stated that even though he did not want teachers “to do partisan politics at schools”, he did expect “every Argentine teacher *to loyally* [serve] *the people and the Country*, inculcating...the *National Doctrine* to future generations”. The Peronism undoubtedly called on the teachers as allies in the construction of its hegemony³⁰. It is not by chance that during the Peronist period —especially after 1952— teachers were benefited with concrete improvements culminating in the passing of a “Teachers' Charter” through an Executive Order in 1954. Among other benefits, the Charter granted more labour stability to teachers, as well as a very significant salary increase. That was the co-option strategy developed by a Government that was looking for the support of a sector of society it deemed critical for the construction of its political project.³¹ The justification of the Executive Order creating the Charter is particularly enlightening of the role the Peronism assigned to teachers. Even though the Charter was justified by the need to “confer permanence and legal force” to the new benefits, it was presented as a prize and a stimulus to officers vested with “the upbringing of the new generations” and, therefore, “the historical continuity of the New Argentina”³².

¿How did teachers respond to this demand by the political system? From what we have already seen, we know that the rise of Peronism had shocked the school world and that the teachers had not homogenously reacted to political changes. It is also well-known that the introduction of religious education at schools had triggered negative reactions in certain teaching sectors. One element which may not be overlooked is that the task assigned by the Government to teachers contradicted values that had been essential to their social configuration. As from the organization of the Argentine educational system, the Government had required teachers to perform tasks having a political and ideological content. As it has been pointed out above, they were the agents called on to *homogenize* the social body in the process of Government construction. Specifically, after the massive arrival of immigrants in Argentina, teachers were required to spread a moral and patriotic discourse aiming to reassert nationality, re-establish a social order which was deemed at stake, and support civic education³³. That meant that the Government trusted school teachers with key *responsibilities and expectations* in the creation of a desirable social and political order from which countless imperatives derived.

The teacher should be an example of “*public and private virtue*”, “*the most appreciated neighbour* because of his or her whole set of personal qualifications”, as a Council officer stated in a succinct way³⁴. This entailed that, besides acquiring

³⁰ Executive Order No. 15,535 dated September 14, 1954.

³¹ Puiggrós, “Los discursos de los docentes”, 213.

³² The coexistence of conciliatory policies with examples of harassment is not surprising. In a previous work, I have analyzed Peronism's strategies towards intellectuals, and it is clear that the regime applied both conciliatory and confrontation gestures on a simultaneous basis. See Flavia Fiorucci, *Intelectuales, Estado y peronismo* (in press).

³³ There are several studies on the school's nationalizing project. For a comprehensive study on the organization of the educational system regarding this topic, see: Lucía Lionetti, *La misión política de la escuela pública. Formar a los ciudadanos de la república (1870-1916)* (Buenos Aires, 2007). See also: Andrea Alliaud, *Los maestros y su historia. Los orígenes del magisterio argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Granica, 2007). Simultaneously, teachers were called on to promote a hygienist project, as the school was conceived as a promoter of public health notions.

³⁴ ([Indications of the Territories General Inspector]), transcribed in Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, *Digesto de Instrucción Primaria* (Buenos Aires, 1920), 442.

certain training, educational bureaucracy requested them to show a thorough personal care, enjoy a good moral and intellectual reputation in their activity area, and have refined manners and gestures.³⁵ Furthermore, as they were supposed to act as cohesion agents, their *militancy in partisan politics was disapproved*³⁶. As the same officer stated, the teacher “should have an equidistant position in all rivalries, quarrels or passions which [may] create divisions among inhabitants of a population”³⁷. During the first decades of the 20th century, these prescriptions gradually became specific regulations. A circular letter issued in November 1915 set forth that teachers were prohibited from making propaganda in favour of or against religious or political beliefs. In view of some problems that had arisen, the 1937 Schools’ Digest clarified the scope of this provision. According to that document, teachers were banned from “being affiliated to political committees, issuing public propaganda in favour of certain politicians, attending demonstrations and other acts showing an active affiliation...as well accepting candidacies for elective public positions without previously resigning their teaching positions”³⁸. That is, not only should the contents taught be politically neutral but also the teachers’ civic involvement was limited by the same principle of impartiality. In line with this requirement, the Government also strongly discouraged union participation, at least that related to the assertion of labour rights. According to a 1930s publication, the National Educational Council considered it necessary to avoid “the confusion of assimilating teachers’ associations with workers’ resistance unions”, “for the teacher, his or her interest and that of his or her employer’s — the Government— should be identified with the children”³⁹. However, in the 1940s there were numerous union associations, although none of them had a national scope⁴⁰.

The discussion above shows that the duty that the Peronism vested in teachers as from 1952, spreading its political ideology, collided with a major principle of the educational order: the teacher’s political and partisan neutrality, even when that task was akin to the teacher’s actions —since as we have previously mentioned, this sector had been responsible for promoting a specific civic-patriotic imaginary. This issue added to the crisis in which the Peronism had sunk the school community and the existence of sectors disapproving of Peronism. The question is thus how this professional sector reacted to a demand that contradicted one of its identity principles⁴¹. Sources allow us to observe during the after-1953 period the persistence of the conflicts associated with Peronism. In 1953, a summary investigation was opened against a teacher of School No. 593 of Santiago del Estero for not “abiding by the internal order of inviting the neighbourhood to a meeting in homage to Eva

³⁵ In this respect, see Lucía Lionetti, *La misión política de la escuela pública. Formar a los ciudadanos de la república (1870-1916)* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila editores, 2007), 149-158.

³⁶ It should be pointed out that political neutrality was a requirement that was not always adhered to. Furthermore, it is known that teachers participated in local patronage/ clientelist networks, which was clearly threatened this ideal of harmony, which implied political neutrality. Lionetti, “*La misión política de la escuela pública*”, 172.

³⁷ Consejo Nacional, “*Digesto de Instrucción*”, 442.

³⁸ Consejo Nacional de Educación “*Digesto de Instrucción*”, 59

³⁹ República Argentina, “*Cincuentenario*”, 149.

⁴⁰ Puiggrós, “Los discursos de los docentes”, 197.

⁴¹ This same dilemma was presented in 1943 with the introduction of religious education. As the literature on this topic has stressed, this issue led to tensions in the teaching world. An editorial of *La Obra* magazine in 1946 complained about the “totalitarian and clerical onslaught” taking place in classrooms. Cited by Puiggrós, “*Los discursos de los docentes*”, 201.

Perón”⁴². A similar situation occurred with teacher Horacio Bufa. He was accused in 1953 by the principal of the school where he worked (School No. 86 of Laguna Blanca, Chaco) for not respecting the national mourning.⁴³ These cases show that in 1953 the school was still affected by the Peronism/ anti-Peronism conflict. Although in the sample files analyzed no summary investigations specifically related to the political use of education were recorded, with the implementation of the new texts, the permanence of this type of accusations makes it difficult to believe that the educational community uniformly accompanied the Government’s call. They also show that the Peronism and its counterpart (the anti-Peronism) kept being matters of dispute at school.

Books produced by order of the Government in 1952 allow us to see the messages that the system sought to transmit, the images that it wanted its students to assimilate, but their presence is not an indicator of the educational community position or permits to elucidate how it translated and spread these messages. It is known that school manuals are very important to guide the educational content, but they do not determine classroom activities. Teachers normally elaborate and negotiate with the contents of textbooks and the ideas and opinions the students already bring⁴⁴. It may be legitimate to think, even if there are no summary investigations in this respect, that Argentine teachers resignified the patriotic speech, the diffusion of which the Government had considered so important during the first decades of the century. This can be deduced from some interventions in *La Obra* magazine —one of the most important teachers' media—, which contained critics to the official nationalism repertoire. The publication favoured a type of nationalism headed for the “knowledge of the country's reality rather than to feelings and thoughts involving a strong emotional bond to the territory or the narration of a national epic”⁴⁵.

In the case of Peronism, Silvina Gvirtz, in a suggesting analysis of school notebooks during the Peronist period, shows that the school institution, through its teachers and certain institutional mechanisms, *neutralized the effects of Peronist contents*.⁴⁶ The use of the school to spread the political ideology called for a group seamlessly supporting Peronism. Even if this situation had occurred, the efficiency of the propaganda campaign would not have been guaranteed either. Investigations on the school have shown that students take in contents selectively.⁴⁷ All this casts serious doubts on the scope of the “Peronization” of educational contents after 1952. On the contrary, Peronism seems to lie at the heart of an important number of controversies arising at schools during those years.

⁴² File No. 58,464.

⁴³ File No. 70,122.

⁴⁴ On the topic of how teachers spread the nationalist message, see: Matthias Vomhau, “Unpacking the School: Textbooks, Teachers, and the Construction of Nationhood in Mexico, Argentina and Peru”, *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 44 No. 3, (2009):127-154.

⁴⁵ In this part, I follow FINOCCHIO Silvia’s analysis of *La Obra* magazine (2009): *La escuela en la historia argentina* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa), page 111.

⁴⁶ Gvirtz, “La politización de los contenidos”, 37 -56.

⁴⁷ A suggestive analysis on how students selectively take in the school curriculum is made by Ben Eklof in *Russian Peasant Schools- Officialdom, Village Culture and Popular Pedagogy, 1861 -1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 179-438

CONCLUSION

Some of the texts regarding the relationship between education and Peronism point out that the political use of education turned the official educational system into a “gear of propaganda machinery”.⁴⁸ The material reviewed here allows us to affirm that even though that was the legislators’ intent, the project became inserted into a troubled world that did not react unanimously to Peronism. The image arising from the sources cited here is that of a school community strongly moved at all levels by the Peronism/ anti-Peronism conflict. Teachers were neither a homogenous group of agents loyal to the regime nor disciplined members of the opposition.

The implementation of state policies regarding education, especially the Peronism dissemination campaign, was marked by these limits. The school — although with unique features— was the backdrop and sounding board for the conflicts the emergence of Peronism opened in Argentine society. The Government clearly thought teachers as allies in its task to achieve accessions. To attract them, it brought about improvements in the teaching profession. Perón’s call could remit to previous national experiences, but also to examples from other latitudes, such as the call made by Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico so that the teachers should participate in a campaign for the diffusion of socialist education, which had concrete results since it received de collaboration —even if conflictive— of the teachers and the population⁴⁹. The Peronist campaign inserted, in contrast, in a context marked by new conflicts, where authorities, teachers and neighbours redefined their social and political identities.

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⁴⁸ Plotkin, “*Mañana*”, 163-165.

⁴⁹ See: Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution. Teachers, Peasants and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

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