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To educate or not to educate: Is that the question?

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The central purpose of the present article is to examine what role has been played by formal education systems in the processes of change in Latin American countries during recent decades.

To clarify his position, the author begins by discarding those theses on the significance of formal education in the social process which derive from the current viewpoints of Marxism and of structural-functionalism. In his opinion, the educational system is neither completely autonomous nor completely dependent upon its social matrix; like other social institutions, it enjoys a certain 'relative autonomy'. The form taken by its structure and changes stems from the fact that education is a social good which may serve as a means of attaining power and privilege, and as such is subject to social conflict and serves as a criterion, *inter alia*, for the structuration and modification of the social classes.

With this thesis as his starting-point, he proceeds to the heart of the matter, i.e., the way in which education has contributed to social mobility, particularly in Latin America; to that end, he examines internal trends in educational stratification, the social bases of educational recruitment and the practical efficacy of formal education in relation to mobility. This analysis leads him to the conclusion that education is at present passing through a critical phase, since it has ceased to be a medium for the absorption of pressures and demands on the part of the social groups and has become a source of fresh conflicts. This must be ascribed to the presence of two contradictory trends: on the one hand, the enormous expansion of the educational system, and, on the other, the very limited absorption of the new contingents by the economic system, with the ensuing detriment to structural mobility. Owing to these opposing trends, the social conflict regarding access to education will probably be exacerbated as relative over-education increases and the value of educational achievements declines.

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Introduction

The rapporteur responsible for summarizing the conclusions of the Meeting of the Expert Working Group on Social Aspects of Economic Development, held in Mexico in 1963, admirably condensed its atmosphere in the maxim: "*When in doubt, educate*".¹

At the same time, the 1963 *Report on the World Social Situation* speaks equally conclusively of the importance attaching to education as an instrument of economic and social development for the developing countries:

"Implicitly or explicitly, during the decade there seems to have been greater and greater emphasis throughout the world on the conception of education as a basic tool of organized society in forming the type of citizen and worker it will require in the near future. Growing concern with the needs of a technological society for educated manpower, the drive for high levels of living, political preoccupations with the creation of cohesive national States, and awareness both of the tightening interrelationship between peoples and the acceleration of social change have all been factors leading to active involvement in education by higher and higher levels of government".²

These two introductory references pretty faithfully echo the keynote of economic and social thinking on the educational question during the 1950s and 1960s. Great expectations and a sort of all-round optimism identified education as the instrument *par excellence* for ensuring the welfare of societies. This conception, applied to the developing countries, meant that all efforts to expand and perfect the formal education systems would contribute towards a quicker and easier transition to more advanced stages of development. In principle, nothing seemed unallied with education; from social integration to the cohesion of nation-States, or from the training of human resources and citizens to the improvement of levels of living.

¹Taken from A. Troop (1965).

²1963 *Report on the World Social Situation*, United Nations publication, Sales No.: 63.IV.4, New York, 1964.

In the framework of this conception, it was likewise believed that education might become an efficacious tool for neutralizing social inequalities, emphasis thus being placed on its redistributive role. This postulate, which will be the central theme of the present article, was also viewed first with fervent optimism and later with profound scepticism. Today, however, the idea that formal education systems could become agencies for the redistribution of social opportunities is, like many of its fellows, in a state of crisis.

At the time, of course, there were very sound reasons for that exaggerated optimism; some, as stated in the *Report on the World Social Situation*, must be ascribed to what was 'happening in the world', while others, specific to the region, related to the particular situation of Latin America at the moment and to that of some of its countries regarded as models.

In the first category must be placed the powerful influence brought to bear on this educational ideology by two lines of thought: firstly, English educational sociology, and secondly, the development of one of the most important conceptual constructs, i.e., structural-functionalism, in the United States. Appreciable, too, on the side of economic and political currents of thought, were the influences exerted by the 'manpower approach' theory, which gained ground as a result of the work of Harbison and Myers (1964), and by the studies on 'civic culture' based on the ideas formulated by Almond.

The contribution of the English school had several virtues, outstanding among which is the revaluation of education from the standpoint of the normative, of the 'must be' or of the teleological types of approach. In particular, the famous Halsey and Floud *Report*, by codifying and organizing the vast body of research conducted in the United States and Western Europe on comparative education, history of education and educational psychology, served as the springboard for a new impetus to educational sociology. As it was an essentially empirical analysis of the behaviour of the educational system and of the actors therein, it permitted the 'discovery' of a new dimension of the educational question, relating to the

potential of education as an instrument of planning.

Functionalism, developed on the basis of the early studies by Malinowski and Redcliffe-Brown, was then to attribute to education, in the classic formulations of Parsons and Merton and also in the work of the social modernization theorists, a strategic role as a 'functional' element closely linked to the integration of society through socialization and social mobility. Here indeed, in contradistinction to the English school, it was easy to identify a strong theoretical emphasis. On the one hand, disciplines such as social psychology and cultural anthropology made it possible to carry out educational studies relating to the socialization processes; while on the other, studies on stratification and social mobility, outstanding among which were those of Davis, Moore and, particularly, Barber and Lipset, cleared the way for approaches centered on the 'permeability of the social structure' and the role incumbent upon education in the 'opening-up' of social systems. In its day, the controversy on the different degrees of rigidity of the social systems of the United States in comparison with those of Western Europe broached some of the main questions linking education with integration and political stability and conflict.

As regards the economic sphere and its relations with education, there was no difficulty whatever in accommodating the functionalist paradigm to the idea of the 'manpower approach'. Harbison and Myers' book also indicated, from the economic standpoint, the need for correspondence between the economic and the educational order, establishing as a functional requisite of growth—or of development—the capacity of the educational system to contribute specific skills to the dynamics of the production system. From the country-by-country records of a high correlation between economic growth and educational levels, the conclusion was drawn that the availability of educated and skilled human resources is an indispensable condition for economic growth.

The other contributory causes of over-optimism must be attributed to the special situation of Latin America in the period following the Second World War and, in a very high

degree, to the influence exerted by the 'models' of the more advanced societies in the region. The phase of import substitution, or of 'inward-directed development', through which Latin America was then passing, was, of course, a particular regional juncture of enormous importance inasmuch as it unleashed social and economic changes of great magnitude.

In this connection, it was not only the effects of industrialization itself that were important; more significant still, perhaps, were the consequences deriving from rapid urbanization, from population shifts and from the increase in social differentiation; all these processes fostered, during the 1950s and the early 1960s, new prospects of 'take-off' in the region. Unquestionably, it was a period of great expectations regarding the viability of a new 'development model', which it was assumed might prosper and thereby narrow the gap between Latin America and the more developed countries. But those great expectations were also coloured by a regional outlook which envisaged in some countries of the area a progress that was precocious or 'premature' in relation to their possibilities.

Some societies —few in reality— reproduced at the regional level the same patterns as were to be found in the developed countries, with their confluence and combination of high income levels, more equitable distribution of wealth, high levels of education, social homogeneity, predominance of the middle classes and, in some cases, a significant degree of political stability. Once again, the concomitant variation of these features was interpreted as a cause-effect relation, and education was understood as a condition or prerequisite for economic, social and political 'modernization'.

Needless to say, perhaps, the course followed by Latin America during the last two decades has barely confirmed even in part the great expectations then generated. Neither have the great changes occurring in the economic sphere made it possible to do away with social inequalities, nor has education played the role which theoretically, in accordance with the assumptions referred to above, it ought to have fulfilled in order to remove the rigidities and obstacles standing in the way of a more equitable redistribution.

Although the sphere of education, considered as a whole, has been one of those in which most dynamism has been shown, both in comparison with the experience of other parts of the world, and in relation to other institutional sectors of society, if the behaviour of education during recent decades is analysed in greater depth, it can be seen that: a) the expansion of education has not succeeded in significantly raising the most deficient levels, i.e., those of large population groups in a state of total or functional illiteracy; b) educational inequality within the system itself has not been substantially reduced; c) there has been an appreciable trend towards expansion of the higher and secondary levels, which have grown at the expense of basic primary education; and d) education has shown little capacity to alter on its own account the prevailing inequalities and the distribution of social opportunities.

This last point is indubitably a controversial issue, and it is argued, as an alternative interpretation, that education is an instrument of social equalization and mobility, by virtue of the scant incidence of social background factors on status attainment.

Here the underlying fallacy stems from confusion between the causes contributing to social change; achievements were attributed to formal education systems which in reality ought to be ascribed to more comprehensive social processes. The structural mobility induced by the great changes that the Latin American countries are undergoing, and the fact that globally the entire structure is moving upwards, notably increase the opportunities for individual mobility. Education in particular thus finds a context favourable to its dynamism in a twofold sense: its expansion and diversification are facilitated, and so is its integration with processes of upward mobility.

In dynamic structural contexts there are unquestionably more opportunities for the most disadvantaged groups to climb to higher educational levels and thence to positions of privilege. Education can thus grow at a rapid pace, faster even than other social activities, and in turn can find in the structure of production channels for absorption of the educated.

There is no question, however, of education's having a specific character that can

guarantee this mobility; in practice, only in the narrow sense of a consumer good *per se* can it be said to fulfil a mobility function.

But if, as we have seen, an 'easy' stage can be recognized in the integration of educational processes with social change, attention must also be drawn to another phase in which difficulties begin to loom larger and may even become insuperable.

What happens to education systems that were expanding rapidly, when structural dynamism comes to a halt and the cycle of 'great changes' begins to run down?

Upon the termination of the processes of economic change, of expansion of the urban and middle-income sectors, and on the conclusion or attenuation of the effect of inter-strata differences in natural growth—all factors that contribute to the attainment of high rates of

vertical upward mobility—, what alternative resources has the system for keeping the social arteries open and preventing their sclerosis? Can education play a dynamic role when structural mobility is broken off?

These questions are all too significant for a forward-looking analysis of education in Latin America. In principle, it would appear that although in most of the region substantial structural changes are in full swing, other societies where the cycle betrays signs of exhaustion can illustrate the limitations of the distributive role attributed to education. Paradoxically, those that were considered 'model' countries—Argentina and Uruguay, for example—afford the clearest evidence that education has increasingly become a generator of new problems instead of an instrument of integration.

I

Education and social inequalities

The challenges which the development of contemporary society itself has been issuing to formal education systems seem progressively more and more complex and contradictory. Their origin must be sought in the very characteristics that have been accentuated in industrialized societies, which, while based on structural conditions of social inequality, lay emphasis on meritocratic ideology, on a production and productivity ethic, and whose productive requirements are to a high degree specific know-how/intensive.

It is common knowledge that the fulfilment of productive roles has become increasingly dependent upon skills acquired in the course of a more or less lengthy passage through the formal education system. Without discussing the necessary or 'artificial' character of formal studies as a requisite for adult performance, the undeniable fact is that in practice formal education has to an ever greater extent turned into the anteroom where future opportunities of access to positions in the structure of production are settled; and furthermore, above all, future opportunities of access to economic welfare, to power and privi-

lege. For youth in disadvantageous economic or social conditions, the formal education system appears as one of the few ways—if not the only one—of overleaping the barriers of social origin through the acquisition of knowledge—or certificates—which will later be tradeable assets in the labour market or in the social sphere.

In this sense, such systems can do much to further social mobility and redistribution of opportunities, while at the same time they may become efficient mechanisms of equalization and social justice in accordance with meritocratic equality criteria.

These were undoubtedly some of the principles upheld by liberal educational ideology, perfectly compatible with the economic postulates of efficiency and productivity, and with the requirements of modern technology.

Nevertheless, it must also be noted that the role of distributor and equalizer by merit is quickly brought up against its limits by two facts. *First*, and obviously, the structural conditions of social inequality are originally answerable to

other causes outside the educational sphere: the transmission of privilege from generation to generation, adscription as a pattern of reproduction of inequalities, which are reflected in the realm of ownership and political control; *secondly*, the dynamics of formal education systems is in one way or another prisoner to their own social matrix.

How can a subsystem such as that of education, which is a constituent part of the general matrix, elude the more general structural constraints? In the view of some, it cannot. The paradigm evolved by 'critical' currents of thought and by *Marxism* has repeatedly indicated that the only possible function for formal education systems is to reproduce and reinforce the established order.

The reason for this —as is maintained in versions that stress ideological aspects— is that formal education systems perform the function of coining a set of values which strengthen the dominant hegemonic structures; or else, according to other Marxist interpretations, that capitalism needs a trained, motivated and well-disciplined labour force as a requisite for its own continuity. For the upholders of this view, formal education never 'liberates' individuals from their social background but prepares them precisely for taking up their appropriate position in the stratified system (Bowles, 1972).

In contrast, other currents of thought maintain that education has every chance of evading structural constraints. In support of this is adduced the essentially mobile, non-adscriptive and technologically-slanted nature of industrial societies. The 'acquisitive' code of values by which they are characterized, as a necessary requisite for the efficient operation of contemporary societies, would seem to point to education as the mechanism *par excellence* capable at once of meeting the demands of the structure of production and counteracting trends towards social inequality and injustice.

From the same functionalist standpoint, in the Davis and Moore version (1966), the problem of equality is posed in different terms: inequality is a requisite of the system and a guarantee of basic individual motivation. Thus education may become a criterion of inequality, although here the inequality in question is —or should be— meritocratic.

In either case, however, the conception is still the same: the role incumbent on education in the transformation of the stratified system and in the opening-up of opportunities for social mobility is a social requisite indispensable for the efficient operation of the economy and of society.

Some coincidences between viewpoints as opposite as those of functionalism and Marxism are evident, and can hardly be unexpected, considering that the approach which sees education as a 'socializing agency' really has its origins in the Marxist propositions themselves. Nor is there any difference in the functional image of education posited from the two angles. The paradigms implicit in the two currents of thought, however, lead to diametrically opposed conclusions: in the Marxist view, a functional requirement for the continuity, stability and integration of the capitalist system is an ideological apparatus —education— capable of ensuring the perpetuation and legitimization of inequalities; from the functionalist standpoint, change, mobility and competition for educational positions constitute the guarantee of its stability and integration. More important still, for the Marxists, formal education systems are not a neutral agency, but are resources used by the ruling classes to reproduce the capitalist order, whereas the functionalist sees formal education systems as agencies of a relatively autonomous and neutral character.

This latter conception is of even more radical importance in the theory of human capital. Education is incorporated into economic theory as a specific type of investment, since "once the concept that investment in education has certain analogies with the capital accumulation process is implanted, education is subject *de facto* to resource allocation analyses, which means that decisions in this field are taken on the basis of certain private or public returns associated with such investment" (Carciofi, 1979).

In the theory of human capital, then, education becomes linked to productivity and thereby to market logic. And in the context of liberal economic theory, no other type of social constraint can operate as a determinant of education, or at most only spurious factors alien to its dynamics.

It is not by chance, therefore, that this viewpoint is precisely the one from which the most severe criticisms are levelled at Marxist and even functionalist propositions, inasmuch as they do not accord education sufficient autonomy and neutrality.

The criticisms directed from both Marxist and non-Marxist standpoints at the concept which envisages formal education as an instrument of change and social equity undoubtedly had the virtue of drawing attention to the fallacy of regarding educational systems as independent of their social matrix. But in their turn they were guilty of a different simplification: failure to recognize that with formal education as a sphere capable of issuing 'passports' to power and privilege, a specific arena of social and political competition was opened up, different from and relatively independent of the other social channels through which the prevailing order could be reproduced or changed. An arena of political competition which, like any other, implies confrontation and conflict between the interests of social groups and classes, a struggle for control of specialized institutions, the existence of contending educational ideologies, pressure and influence groups, co-operative movements, etc.

The dynamics of formal education systems undoubtedly represents something much more complex than a straightforward corollary of the dominant ideology. The idea, implicit in the critical viewpoints, that there is a consistent and effective system of domination capable of transmitting, from the higher levels of power to the educand, a coherent system of indoctrination messages is sharply refuted by the facts of the case.

Thus, the well-known evidences of political radicalism in educated sectors, the repeated expressions of student discontent at the secondary and higher levels of the system, holding good for groups of teachers too, or the very commitment to oppose the *statu quo* common in such educational institutions as universities, seem hardly compatible with the ideological function of a legitimizer of the established order.

Admission that formal education systems as social apparatus are not always bound to be agencies of indoctrination and reproduction of social inequalities, oriented towards the strengthening

of the established order, does not necessarily imply opting for the thesis of their neutrality.

Perhaps the main criticism that can be formulated against the 'optimistic' theories of education as an autonomous agency of change lies precisely in that they consider it as a neutral agency capable of a great deal of freedom of action, transcending the structural constraints of a more general order.

The defendants of these theses do not of course disregard the fact that formal education systems are subject to determinations of their social matrix, but these influences have been underestimated by virtue of a 'positive bias' which considers education as an autonomous agency. This attitude was still further reinforced when more general theories were applied, through planning, to 'educational engineering'. There, the few cautionary reservations as to whether education could remove inequalities and promote change independently of the more general social matrix were perhaps least heeded.

It seems hard to imagine that any kind of rapprochement can exist between such widely differing conceptions of education. And since the divergencies derive from the underlying theoretical paradigms, the moot question is precisely the 'major theory' by which the individual propositions are sustained.

This does not seem to be the place to pursue the theoretical controversy beyond the copious literature already existing, nor, probably, would it be useful to do so here. It seems better worth while to establish instead a few propositions that will serve to identify the options of the present article, and from them to infer some implications for the analysis. The intention is not to demonstrate the why and wherefore of these options, and they are as arbitrary as anyone likes to imagine.

In the first place, from what has been discussed hitherto it seems clearly deducible that education must be regarded as a social value. That is, a socially-sanctioned value is set upon it, and its possession or control is socially considered as desirable.

Secondly, this valuation is not simply something in the mind of individuals, such as an attitude or any other psychological dimension. The quality of education as a desirable good de-

rives from the fact that it is, or may be, an instrument of power or privilege, since its possession or control affords or facilitates access to other social goods.

Thirdly, if it is a thing of value and an instrument of power and privilege, there is bound to be competition for its possession: competition which may be individual or collective; individuals and classes will struggle to retain or acquire privileges in a specific field of conflict. To the extent that education is of greater or lesser relevance to competition for other social goods, the conflict for its possession will be 'central' in a greater or lesser degree.

Fourthly, education will not only represent a good for which classes and sectors attempting to increase their privileges will contend, but may, in certain circumstances, become *the* good around which classes are formed and consolidated.

The inference to be drawn from these four points is that the autonomy of formal education systems is almost inconceivable. Only in conditions in which the possession of knowledge was of little or no importance, could educational systems keep out of the struggle over the distribution of power and privilege, and operate independently of the constraints of society and the State. The more strategic does education become as a mechanism of privilege, the less autonomy will it enjoy.

On the other hand, from the four points enumerated no proposition can be deduced as to the legitimating character of education. Hegemonic domination systems, vertically integrated and profoundly consistent from the ideological standpoint at all levels of the educational sphere, may possibly constitute situations of efficient ideological domination. But neither does it seem appropriate to accept *a priori* that this is the only form occurring, whether in capitalist or in socialist systems. If it is correct to admit that education is a battlefield of social forces, its instrumental and ideological 'function' will be the outcome of each particular situation.

It is a truth which nobody can question that contention over any social good places the privileged sectors in a more favourable position for the use of instruments of power. But as power is not eternal either, is split up, looks to new

sources, is shared and illegitimized, and ultimately changes hands, there seem to be no grounds on which education can be excluded from this dynamics. Perhaps it is precisely in developing societies that the participation of education in these processes of change has been most clearly apparent in recent history.

A final digression with respect to such societies will make it possible to clarify this point.

It was said at the beginning of the present chapter that there are contradictions between the unequal nature of society and its meritocratic ideology. In Third World societies, subject as they are to severe constraints proper to their origins and their insertion in the international system, these features have been strongly emphasized.

In the first place, the colonial past of such societies and their archaic structures, hereditary and but little diversified, generated structures marked by extreme social inequality. Secondly, their orientation towards development models based on technological innovation has also bred formidable challenges in relation to the improvement of productivity, the exploitation of their resources, technological development and the shift of the economy from the agricultural to the urban-industrial sectors.

The two aspects signify in practice social objectives founded on two competitive principles which are not always mutually compatible: that of redistribution and that of economic efficiency.

In the capitalist countries of the Third World, formal education systems became the objects of contradictory requirements. On the one hand, what was expected of them was an economic or technical functionality capable of meeting the demands created by the great changes in the sphere of production, but on the other they constituted a potentially open —and dangerous— field for redistributive action and the levelling-out of social inequalities.

In this sense, it can hardly be assumed that the requirements of expansion and modernization of education systems implicit in the growth strategy itself can have been perfectly harmonious or compatible with the maintenance of former privileges.

The behaviour of the ruling élite during the transition from a 'traditional' to a 'modern-

izing' style (Rama, 1978) was equivocal: on the one hand, they encouraged the productive system and the development of education, but at the same time they tried to retain their privileges. This seems to have become the hub of the conflict over education.

In contrast, from the standpoint of the sectors and classes in process of formation, education is seen as a source of mobility and a road to power. In default of alternative resources of an adscriptive nature of which they were deprived by their own origins, the new sectors made education their principal area of claims and demands. The 'banner' of education and meritocracy which is identified with the ideology of the middle classes in Latin America was undoubtedly consistent with their peculiar insertion in the dynamics of society. It was an ideology that did not, of course, derive from any intrinsic cultural feature of the new sectors, but simply from the fact that they had no other source of power.

Thus the nascent and struggling middle classes found in the formal education system a powerful instrument for their consolidation and their ascent in the social scale, setting up, in opposition to the traditional sources of power, an alternative criterion respecting legitimacy of social differences. Control of education and influence on educational policies became a primary field of conflict: a conflict reflected in innumerable strategies to obtain additional benefits and advantages through the educational systems, among which are included not only the better-known strategies designed to expand enrolment, diversify the cycles of education or raise its levels, but also others aiming at the 'downward' expansion of educational recruitment, by such means as education free of charge, or economic facilities obtained in a number of ways. Nor were the strategies confined to the educational sphere; starting with education, the middle classes waged an equally effective battle for the recognition of their 'credentials' in society and in the economy. The monopoly of the exercise of professions in the sphere of production and in services, the recognition of paper qualifications, the fixing of professional quotas or tariffs, the sanction of legal rules establishing the necessary requisites for entry into the State bureaucracies and many

other similar corporative mechanisms, were all efficacious instruments for defining, in the labour market and in society, circles of privileges based on education.

It is true that against the threat to the former structure of privileges signified by the classes in process of formation, more or less effective defences have been put up; here, too, Latin American experience displays a wide range of strategies. But the importance of the legitimacy bestowed on education by the very emphasis on technical and economic growth has made such reactions more difficult. Generally speaking, the privileged sectors have stood out against the educational reforms that they have seen as most 'dangerous', but have gradually given way before the pressure of the new classes. The reproduction of privilege has tended to take place through the internal differentiation of the educational system, which has kept up or strengthened 'élite' institutions for the upper classes. This mechanism has proved more efficient than containment of pressure for greater participation in the education system; but it has also shown that while the more privileged sectors were able to maintain a channel of individual differentiation for their members, on the other hand they were not capable of neutralizing the 'aggregated' effects of mass education and, therefore, of the consolidation of the new classes and their increasing participation in the scenarios of power.

As regards the Third World countries that have not pursued the capitalist path, and despite their very different social structure, it can be seen that there too formal education systems hold the same key position in class formation. What is more, the struggle for the 'good' represented by education is exacerbated in these societies inasmuch as the socialist changes themselves have closed other avenues of social mobility. Accordingly, it is not by chance that some of their revolutions have been cultural.

China's experience, mentioned by White (1978) among the conclusions of his study is, in this context, sufficiently explicit, and spares the need for further comment, since it shows that the formulation of educational policies is indubitably something more than a mere choice between alternative ways of attaining specific goals. The

same writer says that in view of the decisive importance of higher education as a road to power and prestige, it has been the focal point of keen political strife between the different social strata, which has been reflected in the battle for leadership within the Party. He then points out that the essential conclusion to be drawn from the events of the last two decades concerns the capacity of

the two key strata —each firmly rooted in the structure of the socialist State society— to obtain disproportionate access to higher education —even in face of a fundamental challenge— and to use this access to strengthen their social superiority and hand it down to their descendants (White, 1978).

II

How education can contribute to mobility

When formal education systems are referred to as mechanisms of redistribution of social opportunities, implicit allusion is made to a number of processes and components between which analytical distinctions may usefully be drawn. In this sense, the greater or lesser likelihood of education-induced mobility depends upon: a) the internal stratification of the formal education system; b) the degree of selectivity by social background in the recruitment of students; and c) the real possibilities of converting the success achieved within the education system into economic rewards, or, if preferred, into power and privilege.

a) *The internal stratification of the educational system*

We shall deal with the internal stratification of the system only in its morphological aspects. The forms taken by the educational pyramid —distribution by levels— correspond to the different opportunities for mobility. Thus, the number of levels and the way in which the population is distributed among them constitute an indicator of the degree of rigidity and inequality. Educational pyramids with a broad base at the lower levels and narrowing at the secondary and higher levels will therefore correspond to inequitable structures with scant opportunities for intra-educational system mobility. And conversely, in so far as the educational system expands its secondary and higher levels, that will be a sign of its relative permeability to the upward movement of those entering the system.

Accordingly, the internal stratification of the education system may be regarded as a variable related with the probability of education's being able to act as an agency for the redistribution of social opportunities. In this connection, setting aside other factors, it may be asserted that the less rigid the internal stratification of the educational system, the greater will be the opportunities of social mobility external to it. A lower degree of rigidity therefore seems to be an essential requisite for the existence of an upward mobility effect.

b) *Selectivity by social background*

As the internal stratification of the educational system tells us nothing of the social composition of its recruits, another condition would seem to be needed. The procedures for recruiting students may be, of course, more or less 'regressive' or 'progressive'. In the one case, the formal educational system may exactly reproduce the society's structural inequalities, allocating the same educational 'quotas' to the different social classes; in this situation children incorporated into the education system will reach the same levels as their parents. In 'progressive' recruitment, the most disadvantaged should be better represented than were their parents, whereas in a regressive one the inequality would be increased.

Furthermore, the ways in which individuals are allocated places in the educational system oscillate between two extremes: either in accordance with quotas predetermined in the light of

given criteria, or through the free play of supply and demand in the education market.

In some cases socialist societies have alternated between the two criteria. The controversy respecting meritocratic (market) allocation criteria versus the 'positive discrimination' criterion (quotas implying over-representation for the least privileged sectors) crops up practically throughout the educational policy of the Soviet Union, the Central European countries and China (White, 1978). In the western world, on the other hand, methods of educational recruitment have swung between the free play of market forces and interventionism taking different forms (scholarships for the most disadvantaged, education free of charge, tax exemptions, etc.). In general, the tendency of all these mechanisms has been to strengthen upward mobility patterns and to enhance the redistributive role of education. In contrast, other mechanisms, making for the perpetuation of inequalities, have operated through the predominance of private education, impossible or more difficult of access for the less privileged sectors.

c) *Education as an instrument of mobility*

However, the two conditions mentioned above are necessary but not sufficient.

Access to social positions in keeping with the educational levels attained depends upon two types of process establishing different likelihoods of mobility. On the one hand, these depend upon the relation between the rates of growth and expansion of the educational system, and upon other 'orders' of the social system (for example, occupational structure and income). Structural changes, growth recessions or 'booms', alter employment and income possibilities, with positive or negative effects on openings for mobility; and, in particular, 'structural' or 'transitional' mobility, common to developing countries, is, as has been shown, one of the most important processes of change as regards encouraging individual vertical mobility and facilitating the absorption of school and/or university graduates. The relative 'headway' made by the educational system in relation to the occupational structure and the comparative rigidity of income distribution has, on the contrary, been pointed to as an obstacle to social mobility, and

also as an instance of 'blocked mobility'. Furthermore, the effective mobility made possible by education depends upon the degree of permeability of the socio-economic structure. This is directly linked with the prevalence of meritocratic principles in assigning individuals to social positions, as against other principles of an adscriptive nature.

In principle, there is good reason to suppose that educational attainments must result in more advantageous social or occupational positions, but the evidence suggests that the most disadvantaged entrants to the educational system also have poorer chances of competing in the market.

Studies carried out in those countries where the non-existence of structural change makes it possible to analyse the permeability of the social structure have revealed the persistent influence of social background on 'status' improvement.

Seen in perspective, the findings arrive at conclusions that sometimes differ widely owing to the special features of the design of each piece of research. However, some significant coincidences can be pointed out.

The probabilities that an individual's position in the social structure may be independent of his social origin seem to follow an order of rank; they are highest in the case of educational attainments, lower in that of occupational positions and lower still in that of income levels. Apparently, for those of more modest social origin, to reach higher educational levels is easier than to barter their credentials in the labour market, or to succeed in using these to increase their earnings (Wilson, 1978).

Duncan and Hodge (1963) showed that although the educational levels attained augured access to the occupational structure with greater certainty than social background variables, these too operated indirectly inasmuch as they in their turn determined the educational levels reached. Taking into account the direct effect of social origin on the occupational levels attained plus its indirect effects they concluded that at a conservative estimate social origin and education made equal contributions to the explanation of access to occupational positions.

Griffin and Alexander (1978) were subsequently to add further proof that the 'occu-

pational attainment' process described by Duncan differs according to the level of schooling under consideration: the higher this is, the stronger will be the determining influence of social background factors on those of occupational attainment. The writers referred to note that this is compatible with the hypothesis that secondary school influences are of more importance for the socio-economic career of secondary school leavers than for that of university students. They also say that big differences are observable, in the direction foreseen, in the economic benefits accruing to school academic performance (STAND, i.e., Senior Rank) in the two groups, and that other notable disparities between them consist in the lesser economic benefits accruing to occupational status and the greater influence on annual earnings attributable to factors of social origin (in particular, parental income) and religious background in the case of university students (Griffin and Alexander, 1978).

Thus, the lower the levels of social origin and of schooling considered, the less will be the effect of adscriptive variables, but when the higher stages of education are taken into account, the relative influences of adscriptive and non-adscriptive factors tend to be reversed, and the former become paramount.

Coleman (1966), and especially Bowles (1977), Gintis (1971) and Bowles and Gintis (1976), also agree in stressing the predominance of adscriptive factors and the close determinant linkage between levels of success attained by his scepticism as to the upward mobility function of formal education systems, shows that they are not necessarily the means of mobility *par excellence*. In his study on Sweden, England and the United States he concludes that access to occupational positions higher than those of the parents depends more upon individual factors than on the results of transit through the formal education system.

Other studies also show that the relation between educational attainment and occupational status attainment is not as close as might be expected. Bayce (1983) summarizes some of these findings, and draws attention to the fact that Blau and Duncan (1967) manage to explain 42% of occupational status attainment on the basis of educational attainment; Jenks (1972),

25% of the variation; while Sewell, Haller and Portes (1969), directly account for 34%. This last result is similar to that of Blau and Duncan when they make a direct analysis of the effect of educational attainment on occupational status attainment.

As regards the most important of the models constructed whereby the role of education can be related with economic attainment (earnings), the results were even poorer than those mentioned in connection with the education-occupation linkage. The income variation explained was generally very low (10 and 12%), except in certain types of work where it was as much as 60% (Mincer, 1975), but in these cases the share of the number of years of schooling in accounting for income was only 10%. Such conclusions as these led Jenks to maintain that the role of educational attainment as a determinant of income levels was virtually negligible and that education figured as a good in itself (a consumer good) rather than as a status symbol whereby higher levels of economic welfare could be reached (Bayce, 1983).

More recent studies have made it possible to complete the complex picture of the factors determining status acquisition, showing that a number of intervening elements would seem to act as bridges between social origin variables and those of occupational attainment and income. Thus, alongside the psychosocial factors incorporated by the Wisconsin team (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969) as intervening between social origin and status acquisition, others of equal significance were pointed out. In particular, those demonstrating the importance of the quality—not quantity—of studies pursued (types of school, influences of intra-school relationships, etc.) (Wilson, 1978).

Lastly, further and clearer light was shed when the focus of interest shifted away from social background variables measured as indicators of prestige (occupational or educational), and emphasis was placed on other aspects determined more by power.

Griffin and Alexander (1978) remarked that 'base' variables of this type had much greater predictive power than those traditionally used in other models, and that they afforded evidence of a very close relationship between social background and status attainments.

In short, these testimonies —and others omitted here— have revealed the complexity of factors contributing to status attainment and the role incumbent upon education as an instrument of access to more privileged positions.

Although many of these findings are contradictory or somewhat inconsistent,³ the probability that formal education systems may serve as a ladder to higher occupational positions or income levels is plainly not as clearly delimited as the critical theories have maintained, nor do they enjoy the degree of freedom assumed by the 'optimistic' theories. Rather do their degrees of freedom vary according to the play of two contradictory forces, in which either those tending to reinforce the system of inequalities

may predominate, or those making for change. Each specific situation indicated by studies on different countries and regions⁴ shows differing degrees of structural permeability.

The discussion up to this point might be summed up in the assertion that the probabilities of education's contributing to social mobility and fulfilling a redistributive role will depend upon the degree of permeability of the structure. Accordingly, a less rigid educational stratification structure, educational recruitment criteria and structural changes, together with the permeability of the social structure, may be considered the mechanisms implicit in the redistributive function of formal education.

III

Education and mobility in Latin America

To compare and contrast the considerations so far set forth here with the empirical data available on Latin America is no easy task; and this is particularly true of certain questions that systematic research has virtually neglected.

In the first place, a good many studies are available on what we have termed 'internal stratification of the education system' and somewhat fewer on 'recruitment'. In this connection, the studies carried out under the UNESCO/ECLA/UNDP Project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean afford the most complete and up-to-date diagnosis of the educational situation in the region, together with an invaluable data bank.

Some areas of research remain, however, with which it is more difficult to deal empirically: i.e., all those relating to the linkage between educational attainment and vertical mobility. The lack of studies on 'status attainment' will allow only an indirect approach to the subject.

Secondly, as the objective pursued under this last head is centered on the recent processes recorded in the region, it must be added that the strategy followed will be to make use of a number of previous studies which inevitably relate to different periods.

Lastly, the rest of the article will be organized in accordance with the criteria established in the first section.

1. Trends in educational stratification

All the evidence deriving from analyses of the development of schooling in Latin America and of the trends in educational coverage recorded in recent decades coincides in underlining three aspects: a) the boom in enrolment in formal education systems; b) the different growth rates of the various levels of education; and c) the acceleration of the expansion process in the past few years (Frejka, 1974; Filgueira, 1977; UNESCO/

³For an exhaustive discussion of the theoretical and methodological problems of this line of research, see R. Bayce (1983).

⁴Whereas a great deal is known on the differentiation by countries the same is not true of regional variations. See R. Bayce (1983).

ECLA/UNDP, 1981; Filgueira and Geneletti, 1981; Terra, 1981).

The trends noted in school enrolment in the region, for all cycles, indicated that in the past thirty years coverage of the school-age population (under 24 years old and over 5) had doubled, rising from 25 to 50%. Some countries, in particular those that started from higher levels of coverage, reached a stage in about 1980 at which 6 out of every 10 individuals of school age were incorporated into the educational system. In Argentina, for example, where this figure is recorded, the corresponding proportion thirty years before had been, in contrast, only 4 out of every 10. Other countries, which were among those lagging farthest behind (Guatemala, for example), managed to increase coverage in the same period from 10 to 30% (UNESCO ECLA/UNDP, Vol. 2, 1981). And in countries in an intermediate position (Panamá, Costa Rica, Chile) the increase during the period in question was even more noteworthy.

The same educational statistics show that the biggest contribution to this increase should be attributed mainly to the last two decades, in particular the period 1970-1980. The dynamism displayed between 1950 and 1960 was much less and only in a few countries whose previous levels had been high was this forward leap achieved.

Even more remarkable is the difference in the growth rates of the various cycles, where a positive correlation between cycle and dynamism can be observed. Coverage expands more rapidly in higher than in secondary education, and in the latter faster than at the primary level. Between 1950 and 1980, coverage in higher education climbed from 5 to 16% (a threefold increase), in secondary education from 15 to 25%, and in basic or primary education from 50 to 90%.⁵

The rate at which higher education is expanding in some countries at intermediate stages of development is exceptional, by whatever crite-

tion it is appraised. Ecuador and Venezuela, for example, increased coverage in this cycle from an average of 1.6% in 1950 to about 26 and 23%, respectively, in 1980; in other countries, such as Panama, Costa Rica and Peru, the corresponding figures are close to Argentina's, around 20%. Nor have these changes passed the relatively less developed countries by; some, for instance, like Bolivia and the Dominican Republic, have increased their rates of coverage in the last two decades by factors of 4 and 10, respectively.

At the higher level, too, little dynamism was shown in the first of the decades mentioned, during which period no significant increase in enrolment can be noted. Accordingly, the radical change in educational opportunities at the higher level must be regarded as a process pertaining to the last twenty years.

In secondary education, where dynamism is less, rates of coverage in most countries increased fourfold between 1950 and 1975. Where the process was more dynamic, coverage of over half the population in the age groups corresponding to the cycle was achieved. At intermediate levels of progress, coverage amounted to between 20 and 30%, and to 10% where the pace was slowest.

In 1950-1970 enrolment at the secondary level increased by 620%, and by 814% if the period considered is extended to 1975 (UNESCO/ECLA/UNDP, Vol. 2, 1981). Obvious, too, in secondary enrolment were the educational preferences by which demand was selectively slanted; thus, technical education grew more slowly and failed to keep pace with the general rise in coverage in global enrolment.

Lastly, it should be noted that the growth rate of basic education was sufficient to allow an average coverage of nearly 80% of the corresponding age structure, which suggests that many countries of the region experienced 'saturation' effects and consequently a slackening of their dynamism. Globally, the increase in coverage in primary education showed the region's capacity to expand basic education levels, although, owing to situations of extreme inequality, in some countries, such as Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Brazil coverage was still low in 1980.

The most remarkable feature of the entire process, however, is that there does not seem to

⁵Owing to technical problems deriving from the method adopted, gross rates of schooling sometimes exceed 100. Since 'over-age' is not controlled, there may possibly be more enrolments than individuals in the age group under consideration, which makes for an artificial increase in the real coverage for the ages theoretically corresponding to the cycle (especially in primary education).

have been any balance between the growth rate of primary education and that of the other levels. Thus, even in countries like those just mentioned, where basic education exhibited little dynamism, this did not prevent secondary and above all university coverage from expanding at a much more rapid rate. Noteworthy in this respect is the behaviour of certain countries, particularly Brazil and Bolivia, where the progress made by primary education bears no relation whatever to the rapid growth of the other levels.

When these trends are analysed from the standpoint of social mobility and of their redistributive effects, some interesting implications call for mention.

In the first place, the internal stratification of the region's educational systems, as a trend, seems to acquire less rigid and dichotomous characteristics. For instance, in the education pyramid the distribution trend shows how rapidly expansion is taking place at all levels, but particularly at those of secondary and higher education. From a pyramid with a large base (corresponding to the lower levels of primary education and to the no-schooling category) and with little in the way of intermediate levels, transition is rapidly made to a pyramid that broadens out at its intermediate (upper primary and secondary) and high (higher education) levels.

Secondly, this implies that the educational system has more internal fluidity and permeability, which allows of intra-level and intra-cycle mobility on the part of those incorporated in the system. In some of the countries where the increase in university coverage is biggest, this is reflected in practice, for example, in the fact that almost all those who reach the secondary level move on to that of higher education.

Although inter-country differences in respect of these two characteristics are of obvious importance, this is not the place to analyse individual cases; all that remains to be added is that in those countries which as early as the 1950s already showed higher levels, pyramids tend to be formed in which the transition from primary to secondary and thence to higher education is more evenly distributed. In contrast, in countries where growth is more recent, i.e., inasmuch as the process has lagged behind, mobility seems

much easier at higher levels—from secondary education to the university—than between primary and secondary education. Here there is a manifest screening, at the level of basic education, of those who can or cannot continue to move upward in the system. For those who have surmounted this barrier, their road to the university seems much more assured than is possible in countries with more advanced educational levels.

Thirdly, formal education systems gradually show a more equitable, or less concentrated, distribution of education considered as a 'good'. If the distribution of educational levels is looked at in the same way as that of income, some measurements of inequality show an increasing degree of deconcentration.

Taking the distribution of education among the population over 15 years of age, Gini's inequality indexes for years of schooling showed during 1960-1969 a systematic reduction ranging in the countries of the region—with only two exceptions—between 10 and 18% (Filgueira, 1977).

No figures are available for the 1970s, although enrolment trends can only have been conducive to a still greater reduction of inequality throughout the region. It is possible that countries like Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, which in 1970 had reached the lowest figures in the Gini index (0.34), may not have been able to continue this process at the same average rate as the region as a whole, but for the great majority, where the average figures were 0.55, the downward trend may be assumed to have continued.

This decrease is in contrast to the behaviour of income distribution, where inequity has been but little reduced during the same periods, and which shows extreme relative rigidity and concentration in comparison with the greater equalizing capacity of the educational system. The figures for inequality in income distribution in the countries of the region (for example, Uruguay, 0.49; Brazil, 0.70; Chile, 0.50) are always higher than those for educational inequality, and dynamic trends suggest that the gap between them tends only to widen.

Consequently, less rigidity, less concentration and greater opportunities for mobility are the three distinguishing

characteristics of the internal stratification of formal education systems during the past two decades. Their real effects on the structure of production and on society as a whole are only beginning to make themselves felt, since the boom in educational enrolment is a relatively recent process affecting only the new generations.

The fact that education, during this period, has become the 'societal order' whose relative dynamism is greatest suggests in principle two things: firstly, that the expansion of education and its growth profile have increased the probabilities of upward vertical mobility and, in consequence, have enhanced its potential redistributive role; secondly, that if this is to result in genuine social mobility, either a social structure with a high degree of permeability is required, or else a considerable expansion of opportunities for access to the sphere of production, in keeping with the educational levels that the system is generating to an increasing extent.

2. Social bases of educational recruitment

In the light of the foregoing considerations it seems evident that formal education systems in Latin America could not have expanded as they did without the incorporation of new social sectors, groups and classes formerly excluded from them. In reality, to judge from known data there are few countries of the region, if any, that nowadays can be held to possess educational systems of a traditional or élitist character. To a greater or lesser extent, educational statistics show how far the rigidity of these traditional systems has been relaxed, with the resultant more or less mass incorporation into the educational system.

As regards primary education, the expansion of enrolment and the improvement in the educational levels of the population have revealed the increasing penetration of formal education systems into rural areas and urban popular sectors (Filgueira, 1977). While it is true that, as has been pointed out, in rural areas school coverage has been extended less easily and the countryside-town polarity still holds good, the achievements of primary education have spread to rural areas too, so that gradually a

larger percentage of the population is being covered.

In this connection, a study on *Sociedad rural, educación y escuela* (UNESCO/ECLA/UNDP, 1981) points out that except in Uruguay and Argentina, rural enrolment was expanding in all the countries of the region during the period 1960-1970; in the eight countries considered, however, rural illiteracy decreased less than in 'other urban areas'—except in Ecuador—and less than in the capital in all of them but Colombia and Panama. Hence, in a general context of reduction of illiteracy, the total downward movement is concentrated in the capital and in 'other urban areas', and its pace slackens in rural areas.

That the dynamics of education systems should be slanted in favour of certain milieux to the detriment of others cannot be surprising, nor that preference should be given to those simultaneously combining the positive quality of constituting centres of high population density and nucleation with the negative quality of a low degree of dynamism. Cities of medium size, semi-rural nucleations or those with high percentages of migrant population of rural origin, and the urban popular sectors appear to have been the most direct beneficiaries of the expansion of educational coverage in recent decades; and only to a lesser extent the rural population.

The present situation in the countries of the region seems to derive from a fairly large group of factors, including the preceding degree of relative progress of primary schooling, special educational policies for the eradication of illiteracy, the different groups' capacity for pressure and organization, and the political 'centrality'—real or perceived— ascribed to these groups by the decision-takers. The heterogeneity of situations observable in the region, however, does not preclude tracing a similarity in the way in which educational coverage at the primary level follows the urban-rural line.

With regard to secondary education, the General Synthesis of the UNESCO/ECLA/UNDP Project points out that most of the students incorporated in the secondary cycle represented the first generation of their family to attain that level. Setting aside the upper

middle and upper strata, which have traditionally enrolled in this cycle, the remaining urban sectors, especially the lower middle classes and the higher strata of manual workers, seem to constitute the new clientele of the expanding secondary cycle. In certain countries, still lower strata are also covered, as, for example, some of those engaged in inferior manual occupations and even in unskilled services.

With respect to higher education, for which more student recruitment data by social origin are available, certain trends can be recorded with greater precision.

It is obvious, in the first place, that the lowest social strata are virtually excluded from enrolment and that the proportion of manual workers is very small; this is due to the cumulative effects of successive screening at the primary and secondary levels by which the groups with less possibilities of competing are expelled from the system.

As this is the terminal point of transit through the educational system, it will mainly be reached, as is also to be expected, by those sectors whose family background endows them with comparative advantages over others, while at the same time the new groups forming part of the increase in enrolment will come from the strata that previously had most social mobility.

From the data available for Uruguay (a survey of professionals just graduated in 1970), evidence can be obtained of the small extent to which the lower strata participate in university recruitment. Barely 11% of the total number of graduates came from families in which the father worked in skilled or unskilled manual occupations (Filgueira, 1976). When social background is measured by the father's educational levels, the result shows that father-son mobility is much greater: 18% of university graduates had a family background in which the father had incomplete primary schooling, and 27% came from families where the father had completed the primary cycle. This finding confirms that mobility within the educational system has been much greater than mobility in the productive or occupational sphere, and is consistent with the above-mentioned trends towards differing expansion in the two orders.

In contrast, among the lower middle strata and workers engaged in the higher-ranking manual occupations is to be found the principal base for recruitment of professional graduates, in so far as 47% of them come from such backgrounds. These have indubitably been the sectors that most clearly make use of higher education as an instrument of vertical mobility. The proportion of graduates whose social origin is traceable to the upper middle and upper strata is smaller, although considerable, amounting to 39%.

On the other hand, if social backgrounds measured by the father's education are analysed, it will be seen that of the professionals studied the proportions corresponding to fathers with secondary and primary education were 24% and 45%, respectively.

As was to be expected, other statistics relating to university enrolment in 1968—not to professionals—show even lower origins. While the figure of 11% for recruitment in the lower strata remains the same, recruitment in the middle and lower middle strata increases considerably and a decline is observable in that corresponding to the upper and upper middle strata (57 and 32%, respectively) (Klubitschko, 1980).

In Argentina, again for the public universities as in the preceding case, enrolment figures for the same year represent a social origins profile very similar to that of Uruguay: a slight decrease in the representation of the lower strata (7.1%) is offset with an increase in that of the lower middle and middle strata. Nor are significant differences appreciable in the case of the Universidad de São Paulo and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Such differences do exist, however, in respect of four public universities in Venezuela, where recruitment in the manual-worker strata accounts for 22.4% of total enrolment and in the upper strata for 22.0%.

Data that make it possible to compare two stages in the process are recorded only for Argentina and Uruguay, whose social structures are relatively frozen. In the other cases analysed, it can be inferred, although at the risk of error, that the explanation of some more 'democratic' recruitment patterns, such as that of Venezuela, might lie in the rapid recent changes in their

educational systems, which exhibit, within a general rising trend throughout society, a larger proportion of population from the lower strata than is found in countries where few structural changes take place.

If this were so, the fact that Venezuela's educational recruitment from the lower strata doubles that of Uruguay and trebles that of Argentina might reflect a higher degree of 'democratization' of the educational system induced by structural changes.

This is not meant to imply that in Uruguay and Argentina the educational system does not fulfil a 'vertical mobility' function, since it obviously does so, inasmuch as there are lower and lower middle strata whose members attain higher education; what is asserted is that this function is much more significant in conditions of rapid expansion of the educational and occupational structure.

Lastly, two reflections are necessary to close this discussion, and both relate to certain processes of educational differentiation which are not brought out in the preceding analysis of enrolment.

There is, on the one hand recruitment selectivity by professional careers and, on the other, selectivity by the character of the university or study centre, according to its prestige, quality of teaching, costs, etc. All the known studies show that the social origins of the students enrolled in the higher educational system differ according to the prestige of professional courses, their heavier costs, or expectations of higher income. Thus, for example, the survey of just-graduated professionals in Uruguay proves that the most democratic social composition corresponded to short courses or intermediate university qualifications (out of a total of 11% represented by the manual-worker strata, 23% took paramedical courses (Filgueira, 1977)). In others, such as engineering and economic sciences, the proportion was barely as much as 2%. Evidence of the same kind is found in such countries as Chile and Colombia, where a large share of the increase in enrolment corresponds not to training for 'traditional careers' (like law and medicine) or 'modern' ones (like engineering and chemistry), but to courses

providing credentials that qualify their holders for intermediate-level and dependent posts (UNESCO/ECLA/UNDP, 1981).

Similarly, the differentiation between degrees by the prestige of the universities conferring them affords grounds for attaching only relative importance to global measurement of enrolment as a valid indicator of 'democratization'. Here too the known studies indicate the different composition of the social backgrounds of students recruited in private and in public systems, or in universities of greater and of lesser prestige. Even in public secondary school systems an informal stratification emerges in which there are units of higher intellectual calibre and better resource endowment. Public school models, denominational schools or international secondary school systems (French, English, Italian), are examples of educational differentiation in which the equivalence of the education credential is highly debatable. In this connection, the same processes of differentiation between mobility openings as are found among the United States universities (The Big Three, Ivy League, Eastern Colleges, and The Big Ten) or in the English system (Oxford and Cambridge as against the rest), are being reproduced in the region and acquiring more and more 'centrality' as the expansion of education takes place. Entrance into the élite schools would open the gates to the highest ranks of industry and finance, enhancing the possibilities of 'status attainment'.

3. The efficacy of the education credential for mobility

In order to understand the role of education in social mobility and redistribution the first step should be to observe how vertical mobility operates in the region and thence to draw some conclusions of interest as regards education.

Conceptually, we have known since the time of the early studies on stratification and social mobility that there are at least two types of mobility: one called structural mobility (changes in the composition and volume of positions in order of rank), and another termed replacement or circulation mobility which corresponds to the compensation of upward and downward

movements as a form of movement of the zero-sum type.⁶

We also know that as a general rule the 'structural mobility' processes recorded in the Third World countries are long-term movements towards the opening-up of possibilities for upward mobility. Hence the earlier assertion that given these conditions there is a better chance that formal education systems may become mechanisms of training and selection for occupational positions in process of expansion.

Nevertheless, mobility and redistribution, although frequently confused, are not synonymous terms. There may be mobility in absolute terms without the existence of redistribution, if the whole social structure shifts towards higher levels while maintaining its pattern of internal inequalities.

More properly still, the concept of redistribution through education relates to questions of the permeability of the social structure and to the idea of replacement mobility, not to mobility for structural reasons.

Studies on social mobility in Latin America are not plentiful enough to permit of an analysis representative of the region as a whole. If any generalization can be based on what is known, it might be stated as follows:

First, social mobility (measured by the indexes of the father-son occupational matrix) is relatively less in Latin America than in more developed countries, or at most equivalent in some few societies;

Second, in its composition by the two types of mobility distinguished, structural mobility predominates, accounting for a higher percentage of total mobility than does replacement mobility;

Thirdly—and this is a characteristic feature differentiating the more developed countries from those of the Third World—the former have closed certain cycles of major structural change. It is a matter of degree, since no known country is exempt from changes of this kind, and

some type of induced mobility always makes its appearance;

Fourthly, the predominance of inter-strata or of intra-strata mobility occurs in varying degrees; thus, societies can be distinguished in which the displacements are more significant or less so, for example, with a predominance of upward and downward movements either between contiguous categories or between distant categories. This is because total mobility—the gross mobility index—measures only the quantity of upward and downward movements, and therefore is an unsatisfactory record of the magnitude of mobility;

Fifthly, especially in the Latin American countries, structural mobility is associated with sizeable upward displacements between distant strata, whereas replacement mobility corresponds to movements of a predominantly intra-strata type or between contiguous strata (little movement).

Two relatively recent studies, by Beccaria (1978) and by Do Valle Silva (1979), on Greater Buenos Aires and Brazil, respectively, make it possible to compare and contrast some of these propositions for two different societies within the Latin American system.

For Brazil, in 1973, Do Valle finds a total mobility equivalent to 58.4%, its components being 32.9% of structural mobility and 25.5% of replacement. In relative terms, of the total movements analysed between fathers and sons in six occupational categories (from agricultural workers to large landowners and professionals), almost 60% represents changes induced by the occupational structure. Had it not been for these structural changes, the resulting mobility—of the replacement type—would have been reduced from 100 to 40.

One of the most interesting findings also shows that the behaviour pattern of upward vertical mobility is at an exceptionally high level; of the total number of persons considered, 47% reached positions bettering those of their fathers, and 89% kept their place or rose higher in the scale. Throughout Brazil, therefore, only 11% was affected by downward vertical mobility.

If the inter-generational matrix is analysed in greater detail, it can be noted that when the effects of structural and replacement mobility

⁶We are shelving the discussion of other equally important forms of mobility (see Filgueira and Geneletti, 1981).

are separated, they follow entirely different patterns.

Whereas *all* structural mobility is upward—i.e., 32.9% of all individuals—replacement mobility is broken down by 14.2% of upward and 11.3% of downward movements. Accordingly, if the contribution of the two types of mobility to the expansion of opportunities of social betterment is compared, it will be seen that replacement mobility accounts for only 29% of upward vertical mobility. The remaining 71% is explained only by the structural changes.

Still more interesting is it to distinguish between the effects of the two types of mobility on the distances of the displacements. Here again the contribution of replacement mobility is notably slight in comparison with that of structural mobility. Whereas in the latter the upward movements between the positions of father and son imply displacements between distant strata, in replacement mobility contiguous and intra-strata movements predominate, and the barrier to mobility between the manual and non-manual and between the rural and urban strata is considerable. The great fluidity of the expanding social structure makes it easy for members of the urban popular and even rural sectors to rise to low and medium positions of a non-manual type, and there are even significant instances on record of access to the highest positions from the rural strata. But this is not the case with replacement mobility, which, besides being quantitatively much less, operates mainly within each of the major categories.

If mobility is weighted in accordance with the magnitude of the displacements—one for contiguous strata, two for cases when a stratum is 'jumped' and so on—the contribution of replacement mobility to upward movements, which was, as we saw, 29%, is reduced to 15%.

Beccaria, in his turn, records for Argentina's most dynamic centre a mobility higher than that of Brazil in the aggregate, although its composition is different. The proportion of structurally induced mobility is less than half the figure for Brazil, amounting to 23%. This seems consistent with the foregoing observations, by virtue of the peculiar evolution of the two societies, since Argentina seems to approximate more closely to the situation of the

developed countries. In these, as is shown by studies on England, the United States and Australia, mobility for structural reasons is very low (13, 14 and 25%, respectively).

Out of the total number of persons, upward mobility was observed in 38%, a much lower figure than Brazil's; but there are also differences in the composition of this mobility, since replacement mobility predominates.

Lastly, from Beccaria's analysis it can be inferred that in Buenos Aires the distance of movements is much more limited in replacement mobility than in the structural type; intra-stratum mobility predominates in the former but not in the latter.

Since it is extremely difficult to make a systematic comparison between a capital and a country, any conclusion drawn from this brief review must obviously be viewed with a great deal of caution. It may be assumed that the mobility recorded in Buenos Aires would change substantially if the data covered the other urban and rural areas. There would indubitably be more structural mobility, deriving from the systematic dwindling of the rural population during recent decades, and probably, too, replacement mobility would be less, considering that the contexts excluded are precisely the least permeable and the most adscriptive.

Accordingly, the analysis of Brazil and Argentina demonstrates the remarkable incidence of structural changes on the expansion of opportunities for upward mobility, as well as the extreme rigidity and scant permeability of the social structure as regards the promotion of compensatory upward and downward movements; and this is more marked, it must be repeated, in Brazil and in Buenos Aires.

If structural mobility in Brazil were assumed to disappear, only 14% would have experienced upward mobility between one generation and another, and this mobility would have been confined mainly to intra-strata displacements; the aspiration of the less advantaged sectors to see their children reaching high and intermediate occupational levels could be satisfied only by a very small proportion of the population.

In Argentina, where some decades of intensive structural dynamism are recorded—it should be noted that inter-generational mobility

comprises fathers who were in the EAP as far back as the 1930s—the findings show less structural mobility and more permeability. But while in Buenos Aires upward mobility by replacement is greater than in Brazil, amounting to 25%, it also occurs between contiguous or not very distant categories. In so far as structural changes were gradually frozen in recent decades, opportunities of upward mobility seem to have been limited to a structure that is not favourable to movements between the major categories.

Probably, therefore, when there are no structural changes, or at least in face of an increasing crystallization of the structure, class barriers become more clearly defined and mobility is confined to self-recruitment.

The implications of what has been said of education up to now are obvious, and clarify the distinction made between the 'easy' and 'difficult' phases because of their possible incidence on social mobility.

A further distinction may be drawn between two conceptually autonomous dimensions which may explain these phases and the ways in which they develop.

The first of these dimensions consists in the relative degree of expansion of the educational 'order' in comparison with the increase in openings for mobility (occupational structure). It may be represented as a continuum which stretches from a pole where education and occupation are in balance ($E=0$) to another extreme pole of disequilibrium where education runs ahead of the occupational structure ($E>0$). This dimension corresponds to the acknowledged autonomy of education, which in Latin America reveals a much greater capacity for expansion than other social stratification dimensions such as the occupational structure or income (Heintz, 1969).

All that has been studied hitherto shows that, in effect, this has been the dominant pattern in the region and that the alternative $E<0$ is empirically non-existent, unless in conjunctural situations and for a brief spell. This was demonstrated in the first section of the present chapter when changes in the internal stratification of formal education systems were discussed (Filgueira and Geneletti, 1981).

The second dimension relates to the types of mobility where a continuum can be seen to

extend between the extreme poles of little or no mobility of any kind and a predominance of replacement mobility, with an intermediate phase of predominance of mobility of the structural type.

If the two dimensions are represented as in figure 1 by two orthogonal axes, a space of four quadrants is created which represent different opportunities of mobility.

In dynamic terms, the movement of societies in Latin America has signified a shift from quadrant 1 to 4 (trajectory a). After an initial situation of very little mobility, the predominance of structural mobility gradually increased, while at the same time the development of education began to outpace that of the occupational structure. The first stage of the trajectory, in quadrant 1, therefore represents the 'easiest' moment of the positive relation between education and mobility. In one way or another it was the advantaged 'newcomers' that entered the education system during this phase who enjoyed the best social mobility conditions. The increasing predominance of structural mobility and little competition for jobs were undoubtedly the factors which helped to bring this about.

The subsequent trajectory which evolves in quadrant 4, however, corresponds to increasing difficulty with respect to social mobility. Education advances farther and farther ahead of occupational opportunities and, at the same time, structural mobility tends to surrender its predominance to replacement mobility.

The 'terminal' point of the trajectory, where to the freezing of structural changes is added a high degree of tension between the educational and occupational orders, seems to bring education to the critical limit of its capacity to promote social mobility.

Obviously, however, in principle there is no precise terminal point in any of the dimensions, and the idea is valid only for the representation in the figure; neither the 'mobility' continuum or the 'disequilibrium' continuum has a clearly-defined limit.

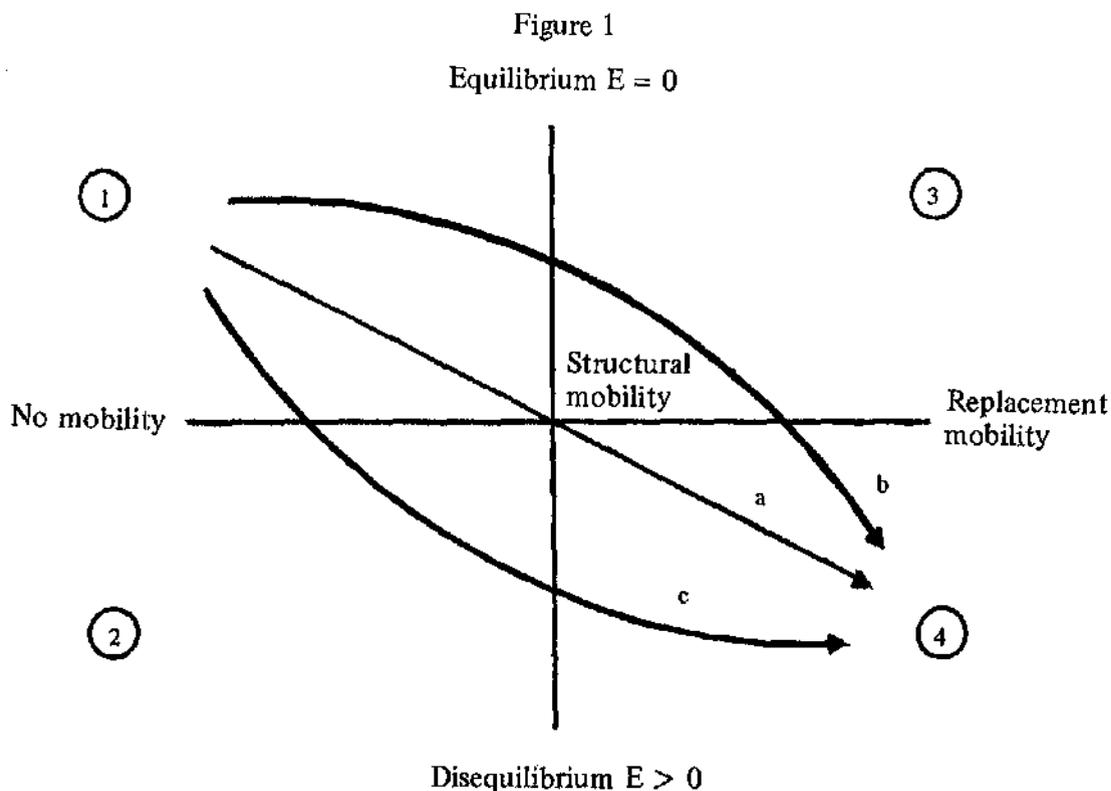
For education to surmount the critical point and once again become efficient in relation to mobility, one of three things must happen: either the permeability of stratification must

increase (replacement mobility besides being predominant is high), the disequilibrium generated by the disproportionate growth of the educational order must be reversed, or the structure of production must start expanding again at a new rate.

All that has been discussed up to now seems to preclude the possibility of the first alternative. The second would imply a spontaneous or authoritarian discouragement of education, as is partly evidenced by what has happened in the more advanced countries such as Argentina and Uruguay in recent years. Nevertheless it seems extremely unlikely to occur before a veritable collapse of the expectations of social mobility through education. At most, Latin American experience shows that the fewer real opportunities of social mobility there are, the greater is the emphasis upon and competition for education as a 'good'. In open democratic systems the interplay of aspirations and pressures for more education on the part of the middle and popular strata and the difficulties of satisfying demands for real mobility met with by

those in power seem to have notably strengthened the expansion of the educational 'order' in view of the rigidity of other channels. In this sense, the quest of legitimacy in face of the pressures for increasing participation allows the disequilibrium between education and structure of opportunities, as a way of absorbing tensions, to be aggravated to extremes that more and more seriously endanger the stability of the system. Under authoritarian governments, on the other hand, it is possible that this may not occur in so far as the pursuit of legitimacy is abandoned or diminishes.

Furthermore, figure 1 also makes it possible to establish an interesting distinction between the different trajectories of the countries of the region. Apparently, the longer ago a society's mobilization process began, the more closely did the trajectory resemble that of type b in the figure. Thus, the tension between education and occupational structure developed belatedly, allowing an easier and more prolonged period of educational efficiency in respect of mobility. In the countries that reached



this stage later, the path followed becomes more similar to trajectory c, where education increases rapidly and gets ahead of the occupational structure. These societies, with all their specific differential features, still seem, at all events, to have a relatively wide margin for progress at their disposal, thanks to the structural changes that still lie before them. It cannot be overlooked, however, that some countries with educational trajectories like that of Brazil, or others which make faster progress like Ecuador or Venezuela, are already facing enormous difficulties deriving from their acute and 'premature' disequilibrium.

In this connection, it is hard to imagine how structural changes can absorb the increment generated during the last two decades, tenfold in the case of university enrolment, or fivefold in that of secondary enrolment.

While it is true that some of these countries can still expand their occupational structure within reasonable margins, it seems unlikely that the process can be maintained at the same rate during the next few decades. Moreover, the effects of the enrolment explosion in recent decades are only beginning to make themselves felt in the structure of production, and their implications are still unforeseeable.

IV

Final considerations

From the data considered in the present article no precise estimate can be made of the magnitude of the impact of education on the more general processes of social mobility and redistribution of social opportunities. Nevertheless, it is possible to reach the conclusion that formal education systems have not been dissociated from these processes, and that at certain stages of the countries' development they have held an outstanding place, particularly when the new urban middle classes were formed and far-reaching structural changes were the order of the day.

It has also become evident that certain interpretations relating to education's high degree of autonomy or total dependence on the social matrix are untenable.

Rather, what the formal education systems do have is a relative autonomy, inasmuch as they neither simply and solely help to reproduce the matrix of social inequalities, nor can free themselves from its constraints. In this sense, education as an agency for issuing passports to power and privilege is subject to a good many more limitations than the 'optimistic' theories could have dreamt of; the mobility function attributed to education seems to be more efficacious than its redistributive function.

Moreover, the outlook for the future deriving from the analysis of social trends in education and mobility is disquieting in the extreme. Education in Latin America seems to have reached a critical point at which it has ceased to be a mechanism for the resolution of problems and has become a generator of new conflicts.

In the light of the social consequences of the superimposition of two parallel processes, one being the disproportionate growth of the educational 'order', and the other a loss of predominance of the mobility induced by structural changes, a tautening of social tension can be predicted for the future. At different rates and speeds, all the countries of the region seem to be moving in this direction.

If exhaustion of the mechanisms of structural mobility is foreseeable in the more or less near future, and if the possible occasions of mobility will be predominantly those deriving from a low degree of permeability of the social structure, it is hard to imagine what alternative mechanisms can be applied.

It is true that the same problem arises in the more developed countries and that in their case the positive effects of education on redistribution are less important than has been theoretically assumed. But it is also evident that

in them other processes associated with the 'welfare State' have done a very great deal to neutralize social inequalities.

The fact that countries like Germany spend US\$ 1 900 per capita on 'welfare' or Italy 830, and that the percentage represented by its costs amounts to almost one-third of the GDP in the Netherlands, Denmark and France—to quote only a few examples—shows the capacity of these societies to implement alternative equalization mechanisms. Nor is there any evidence in the United States, where education has been envisaged as the redistribution instrument *par excellence*, that welfare policies

have not been a more effective mechanism for the attainment of distribution objectives.

There is no sign of any such thing in the countries of Latin America, where the welfare State is still incipient and is confronted, as throughout the world, with increasing difficulties in the way of its expansion. It is predictable, therefore, that in these countries there will be a marked consolidation of the rigidity of their social structure, accompanied by an exacerbation of the problems connected with relative over-education, devaluation of educational credentials and competition for educational 'goods'.

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