

The debate on Chilean education in the Op-Ed of *El Mercurio* (2011-2014)*

El debate sobre la educación chilena en la sección de opinión de El Mercurio (2011-2014)

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Abstract

*This article analyses critically, from perspectives linked to hegemony theory, some of the concepts and argumentation used by the journal *El Mercurio* in Santiago in order to influence directly or indirectly the educational debates in Chile between 2011 and 2014, having as background the struggles of the student movement. With this purpose the text studies editorial comments, columns and letters to Director centered on the reforms proposed by the students (and some university professors) and related to themes like greed, free tuition of studies, democratic governance of higher education, and the relation between the public and the private in education. At the end, the research asks for the echoes of these kind of journalistic message in the revival of fears and resistances to the change of the neo-liberal educative model of the military dictatorship, which is still operative during the democratic transition.*

Keywords

Hegemony; argumentation; education; higher education; student movement

Resumen

Este artículo analiza críticamente, desde la perspectiva de la teoría de la hegemonía, algunos de los conceptos y argumentos con que el diario *El Mercurio* de Santiago busca incidir, directa o indirectamente, en los debates educacionales producidos en Chile, entre los años 2011 y 2014, y que tienen como trasfondo las acciones del movimiento estudiantil universitario. Con este fin, se estudia el género argumentativo de la publicación: columnas, editoriales y cartas al director del diario, que aluden a las reformas propuestas por los estudiantes (y algunos académicos) en función a las temáticas que se especifican en el artículo: gratuidad, lucro, democracia y lo público y lo privado en educación. La indagación propuesta explora, hacia el final, el eco de estos argumentos en la revitalización de temores y resistencias al cambio del modelo educativo neo-liberal de la dictadura militar, que continúa en gran medida vigente durante la transición democrática.

Palabras clave

Hegemonía; argumentación; educación; educación superior; movimiento estudiantil.

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1. Introduction

The representation of political and ideological debate in mass communication media within a society is the end product or partial result of the transformation of ideas into communicative messages. It is the result of varying types of procedures that characterize the press, and contribute to explaining their particular effects. The messages in these forms of media are generally related to the culture of a given society, but this isn't exclusive as they also relate to power strategies in different social groups and classes. This analytical perspective is what is generally taken from studies on ideology and communication media, and the same holds true for the present study; said perspective will lead the analysis on the form in which media in Chile collects ideas and guides the debate on education in the most active and agitated period in the student movement, between 2011 and 2014.

Among recent essays on ideology there's Barrett's (2003) paper which pays particular attention to Hall's studies on Thatcher's "authoritarian populism" in England. Hall (1988) maintains in one of his articles that the Thatcherite authoritarian populism

is not a treaty nor pure rhetoric, because it operates on genuine contradiction and has a rational and material core. Its success and effectiveness are not a results of its capacity to deceive those that understand nothing, rather due to the manner in which it posits real problems, real lived experiences, real contradictions, and it is capable of interpreting them within a certain logic or discourse that aligns them systematically with policies and strategies from the right or conservative class (56).

In the English case these real experiences and contradictions are in regard to the capitalist crisis of the 80s, the decline of the British economy and, in reference to education, the complaints from entrepreneurs and the "panicky" elite and their concerns regarding the poor

quality of education for workers, which has obvious consequences on the efficiency and the productivity of a nation going through a period of intense international competition and a steep recession.

Apple (1997) has a similar vision of the situation in the US during the Reagan presidency. They link the rise to political positions in education of the conservative party – also inspired by the works of Hall – with the parents' concern over the financial future of their children...

in an economy that is increasingly conditioned on dwindling wages, unemployment, capital outflow and a climate of uncertainty (conditions in which) the discourse of the right – with their emphasis on the fall in standards, violence in schools, the need for authority – comes into contact with the expectations of many of the working and lower classes (89).

A similar analysis can be made in Chile, especially regarding processes imposed on the population by the dictatorship between 1973 and 1990 and then, from different perspectives, between 2011 and 2014, a perspective focused on in this study. A look at the processes will serve to contextualize and provide a broader framework for the debate at the heart of this research.

2. Theoretical Framework

There is a certain literary consensus (Foxley, 1982, Sunkel & Zuleta, 1990; French – Davis, 1999, 2005; Eyzaguirre & Marcel, 2005) in which the military dictatorship creates a radical rift with the introduction of capitalist Chilean development that continued until the early 1970s, a style centered on industrialization and democratization of politics and social institutions. The trend moved even faster with the Developmentalism of Frei's government, and Allende's socialist project.

Two different interpretations of a social indicator, the Gini coefficient encapsulates this rift. In 1973 the Gini coefficient was 0.47 in Chile, the lowest

in the country's history. In 1988 toward the end of Pinochet's government the same indicator had risen to 0.65, one of the highest in the world at that time and signifying great inequality (Baño, 2013).

According to Baño whose text these figures are taken from, the central factors explaining the level of inequality are: brutal repression of political participation, the steep decline in wages – only in 1988 did wages manage to get back to where they were in 1871 – and the privatization of public services such as health, education, social security, transport etc. To this we must also add that all the aforementioned changes were drastic in their appearance and took place over a very short period of time. This is the global framework that may explain how these policies impacted on the very make up of common sense in the middle and working classes that were thrown into a situation where they had to financially defend for themselves; this is a place far from the life experience prior to 1973.

There is also awareness among intellectuals and governing politicians of the need to build a new form of common sense. In an article by Guzman "The Political Path", published in 1979 in the magazine *Realidad* one can read...

it is not only about the restitution of economic and social freedoms they are entitled to which were gradually taken away... it is also a necessity that said personal freedoms become a reality among Chileans for a sufficiently prolonged period, the purpose being that the enjoyment of the fruits of their labor be ardently defended by the citizenry that benefit from them. Lets not forget that freedom is really only appreciated by those who have had the good fortune to have experienced it, and the latest generations of our country have benefited from neither social or financial freedom, therefore nor have they gravitated toward amplifying and strengthening their political freedom... only a period of social and financial freedom sufficiently long enough to truly feel their benefits will be defense enough against future socialist uprisings (374 – 375).

In the field of education this general framework undergoes no substantial changes with the transitional governments moving back toward democracy. Firstly due to the effects of organic constitutional law, the LOCE with which the dictatorship ties its future educational transformation with counter-majority policies; but this too is due to the politics of consensus coming from the Democratic Coalition in over-representation of the same minority groups. Despite there being a level of return to state participation in education, other policies of privatization become even stronger, like those that allow the Friedman vouchers be completed with funds provided by parents, which in turn lead to further school segregation.

In 2006 the "supporting actors"¹ took to the streets in protest, and then, in 2011, it was the university students who marched, took over schools, universities and all talk and dialogue on the subject, vehemently opposed and questioning of the logic behind the model inherited from the dictatorship. They had tried before, but in 2006, and later in 2011 debt, huge disparity between public and private schools, the precariousness of public education and the barriers erected preventing access to quality education as well as the crisis in capitalism all led to hundreds upon thousands of students marching for their rights all over the country. We must point out that even though these massive student movements were socially composed of students from municipal schools and state universities, the protests also attracted large groups of students at subsidized schools and private universities like the Catholic universities.

Faced with these student movements the media apparatus of the right mount a massive, closed and strategic defense of the current model which extends to opinion pieces, letters to the editor and editorials written by authority figures linked to the "Concertación" or *Coalition of Parties for Democracy* and those in the center of the political spectrum. The remainder of this article is an analysis of the ideas publicized and diffused about education, and in particular higher education and in their majority through the newspaper publication *El Mercurio* in Santiago.

The newspaper is highly influential on public opinion and the creators of public policy. To that we add occasional commentary and essays published in other medium or publications by the same authors in the present analysis.

As already indicated above the overall theoretical framework covers the concepts of hegemony and ideology as developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1987), Barret (2003) and Hall (1988), in conjunction with students from Apple (1997) for ideologies in education. To complement the above analysis I will also include perspectives from intellectual and the history of representations.

3. Development

If we consider the concessions requested by both students and academicians participating in efforts to radically change the educational model, that is to say: 1) the idea that education is a social right that should be de-mercantiled and universally by the state; 2) the idea of free higher education; 3) an end to for-profit establishments and 4) internal democratization of everything, but most of all higher education; we can envision that they imply a total transformation of the neoliberal model left by the dictatorship. However, they are not alone, it also implies changes to the Concertación's reform that, despite making the model more central, has still left the market model largely unchanged.

Faced with the threat of radical change the newspaper *El Mercurio* centers on a profound criticism of all these subjects, based on the permanent diffusion of expert opinion, both right wing as well as those linked to the Concertación. In particular the access given to intellectuals from the Concertación reinforces the newspaper's image as a liberal, objective and pluralist publication, but it also sets the condition that experts and politicians giving their opinion defend an educational model built on a nucleus of ideas inherent to the neoliberal model, deliberately contravening the demands of the students. This point is of central importance:

the political purpose of *El Mercurio* is geared toward creating a nucleus of ideas that isolate the students and those that support them, and congregates intellectual and opinion leaders forming part of numerous commissions responsible for generating consensus on the transition of education. The idea is to organize a political and intellectual centered on the debate on education and higher education that goes beyond right political leanings and includes directors and intellectuals that are active members of the liberal political center and Christian Democrats.

We must emphasize that the manner in which the newspaper goes about this is by defending *points of view and arguments* appearing in editorials, opinion pieces, letters to the editor etc.; in essence through argumentative strategies and conceptual discussion. In a sense *El Mercurio* comes across as an educator – and builder – of a managing class, as indicated in several other critical studies on the medium in 1980s and 1990s (Sunkel, 1983; Duran, 1995).

The level of argumentation in these texts is relatively high, as befitting an elite publication that seeks to further influence an elite intellectual class. This is why the present analysis centers on the ideas that seem most frequent and most relevant, more so than on the strictly journalistic strategies and mechanisms used to disseminate said ideas. To analyze these mechanisms would require a statistical analysis that may introduce new perspectives.

3.1 Free Higher Education

The first of the issues heavily criticized by *El Mercurio* is the issue of free higher education, one of the 'ungodly' demands of the student movement that radically questions the current educational model. In said model higher education is considered a consumable, a purchasable product or investment. In the long run what is at stake are utilities, profitability or the cost-benefit ratio.

One meaningful column on the subject is that of Carlos Peña, an intellectual with ties the Concertación, a Dean at a private university – the

University of Diego Portales – and a writer for the newspaper. His column published on the 9th of October 2011 is titled, and significantly so, “Free education is unfair!”. In his column Peña cites two reasons justifying his stance:

It is better to give more to those who have nothing than to give the same to those who do and those who don't (...) the consequences for education are obvious: it is better to subsidize the poor and leave the rich the same or worse (but not better). Does the previous change if the education is financed by taxing the rich still further? No. Regardless of the source of the necessary resources, inequality is better served by subsidizing rather than handing out the same to those that have and those that don't have.

The second reason relates more to the arguments of the students, according to which gratuity for the public system

would integrate the rich and poor into the same institutions and bind their fates to one another (...) consider this, society would be more integrated and share a stronger sense of community (...) are the students right? Unfortunately no. Considering the more important spots are assigned dependent on performance, and the latter correlates with income, even if education were free and integrally public, the richest would have to gather in the more prestigious institutions, and the poorest in the least selective. It would lead to the same situation we have today (only this time it's free).

The newspaper supports Peña's arguments in multiple ways. For example, the Ex-Vice-chancellor of the Pontific Catholic University Mr. Carlos Williamson wrote a letter to the editor which was published on the 4th of October 2011. The title of his letter was “Free Education and Justice” and maintains that gratuity in higher education would violate Rawls second principle of justice, affirming that in order to justify the principle there must be equal opportunity for all adding that, through taxes the poor also contribute to financing education, with which Rawls require-

ment it be “to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged” is ultimately broken. After which he concludes that for a country with persistent levels of extreme poverty there is an “imperative need to focus public resources on public spending” and that “only great irresponsibility or perhaps ignorance can explain how an issue that should have been consigned to the annals of history still survives today”².

A similar argument is the premise of the document published by the *Center of Public Studies* the most important *Think Tank* of the neoliberal Chilean right wing. Written and published on the 7th of October 2011 by Harald Beyer, who would later become the Minister of Education under Piñera's first presidency, and Loreto Cox the document titled “Gratuity in higher education: a regressive policy”, also justifies its stance using Rawlsian arguments, and cites important figures from the 2009 Casen survey. These figures to a certain extent contradict Peña's and Williamson's statements. In effect both Beyer and Cox conclude from survey data that in effect it doesn't matter if higher education is free, given that only the 17% of the poorest percentile in Chilean society does not study due to financial concerns. But if you look at the other reasons given by the surveyed 18% don't study because they work, 5% because they help at home, 14% because they are parents and 11% because they think at that age you no longer need to study. It seems probable that a policy designed to substantially increase the number of free enrollment slots would effectively and positively contribute to improving these numbers significantly.

Many other editorials, columns, interviews and letters to the director offer a defense of the positions described earlier, especially in 2011. For example, to quote the weekly column in the “Financial issues” section for 2011, which has a sub-heading that reads ‘why gratuity is unfair for the poor’, and an editorial published on the 4th of October 2011 which reads thus “If we were to insist on a policy of gratuity, approximately a quarter of public resources would be spent trying to satisfy this policy and only effectively benefit 10% of homesteads with higher income”.

Lastly it is of interest to mention another column in "Economic issues" published on the 9th of June 2012 and titled "The private sector in the educational system", in which the writer advocates a mixed model, both public and private, where establishments compete on equal footing for student enrollment, which in higher education as Friedman recommends (1966), results in a paid public education because otherwise there would be no equal competition with privatized higher education. Clearly this argument assumes a preference above all for the existence of a privatized private higher education, which one should attempt to demonstrate and not simply assume.

Faced with the multiple reprimands favoring the regressive nature of free higher education, one example of a different stance is a letter to the editor from Fernando Atria. In his letter, written in response to many other comments, Atria – one of the first academicians to defend the free public higher education and the overall right to education³ – arguing specifically against the Peña's argument of gratuity and injustice, maintains...

If socialized programs are focused, the respective services will have to segregate: there will be health and education for the poor and rich alike (...) In other words, in theory it is true that the source of resources notwithstanding, if they were to spend only on the poorest, inequality would be reduced. But case in fact, when one takes into consideration that part of what is so poorly distributed is influence and political power then it is clear that the available resources (...) are not independent of the manner in which they are spent.⁴

In regards the Peña's second argument, Atria contends that it is convincing but only if considering total integration of the system, which is also a defense of progress toward ending segregation. Also, Atria outlines something here he will develop further in the future, he contends that...

What is in discussion here is the "model", the transition from a focalized to universal model. A universal model (...) seriously considers equality for all citizens, while a focali-

zed model is a form of "forced graciousness": assistance for the poor that at the same time reinforces class structures (what Peña calls a "society of heirs").

Williamson also responded to an argument similar to Atria's in an aggressive letter to the editor in which we find the following phrases: "On the other hand the reader Atria seems in need of an example so that he may understand why a general tax as the basis for financing higher education for all is a regressive policy" (9th of July 2011).⁵

3.2. Economic determinism in higher education

Another argument defended by the columnists at *El Mercurio* refers to an implied economic determinism. In the B section of "Business and Economy" published on the 12th of July 2011 we found a note from Francisco Rosende, Dean of the Faculty of Economics at the PUC and in which we read...

we cannot get round the fact that a private rate of return in university education is oft quite high, which generally means that private funding must constitute an important part of total payment, which means current credit systems need to be perfected.

As is, an argument like this one is only sustainable if, due to principle, that the truth is investing in education has to be economically viable, and the alternative of education as a social right is simply not considered. Again we talk from the perspectives of enormous paradigms. Rosende conceives education as an extension of the works of the neo-liberal economist Becker (1993) on "human capital" and his proposal to apply economic analysis to all social institutions.

3.3. Profit in education

About the third subject, the question of profit, we also refer to a column by Rosende in which...

(in the so called "knowledgeable society" we need a broad and varied offer of education) (...) and here it seems of particular importan-

ce to contribute with private funds and in so doing support the growth of a varied, high quality offer of university education (...) (but) private investment in higher education requires that we remunerate in a manner not dissimilar to the way we would pay other activities, which should not be motive for controversy or conflict.

Alvaro Fischer presents a more rigorous defense of profit in education, a businessman that at the time was the President of the Chile Foundation. His column "A desire for profit: so what's the problem?", published on the 27th of August 2011 read as follows: "a good portion of humanity spent the better part of the last century testing an economic system that did not involve profit... and it failed". Developing his idea further Fischer concludes without feeling the need to prove his premise, one that has been naturalized in Chile, that...

in the case of universities it is not important whether they are for-profit or not, but rather that they provide the services they commit to provide (either mass service or level of excellence) in a competitive environment, an environment in which people freely choose where to study based on their own merit.

Shortly after, on the 7th of January 2012, the magazine *Sábado* interviews Fischer promoting him as an atheist evolutionist:

I am not one of those people that believes inequality is the biggest problem in Chile (...) people always compare themselves to one another for good evolutionary reasons. They would prefer to earn 100 if their peers earn 50, 200 if their peers earn 300 (...) if we only focus on inequality we then forfeit all other issues such as the incentive to work, personal endeavor (...) I am going to get in trouble for saying this, but I think there is too much of Father Hurtado in our national soul. That Father Hurtado's work symbolizes Chile (...) prevents us from focusing on effort, self-improvement, growth and competition.

Fischer's social Darwinism is far from an exception in the ideas *El Mercurio* disseminates, it

simply constitutes a deeper and more explicit attempt to justify the options provided by the newspaper. It is interesting to this particular study that said justification is based on values of personal effort, competition and work incentives, which are all values that may seem central in a precarious society and economy, as we stated at the start of this analysis.

3.4. Higher education and democracy

The fourth subject at the center of the demands of the student movement *El Mercurio* refutes is the internal democratization of university institutions. The context in Chile being that, until today practically only in State universities⁶ can academicians choose their authority figures. The newspaper's opposition to that concept, in typical rhetorical fashion, is well reflected in a column by Agustín Squella, an academician and former Dean of the University of Valparaíso, and another intellectual with ties to the political party 'La Concertación'. In his column "Unacceptable" published on the 5th of August 2011, after listing a series of issues in university politics that he deems deplorable he maintains:

It is unacceptable that democracy be requested within universities, it is a form a government for societies at large, not institutions, and because its underlying golden rule – the majority rule – could not operate efficiently in a church, army, company, much less a university. What should exist in universities is class participation.

Squella's words refer to student participation under the concept of majority rules, a position that at the time no one was defending. But *El Mercurio* also spreads the message through its columns that it opposes the election of authority figures in universities, even if elected by the faculty, an opposition made clear in columns with titles like the piece published on the 24th of May 2014 under the heading "Dean elections and governance in universities". Its author, Oscar Garrido, writes:

In the present year 16 universities – 11 of them state universities – have chosen their dean through a system that established the faculty as the election body. This poor system is the root problem in our educational system (...) that the faculty elect deans has fostered the creation of groups of interest, bureaucracy and inefficiency in the management of financial resources, giving rise to a permanent climate of crisis (...) Government and parliament should agree to a genuine reform of university politics, eliminate electoral procedures to name those who direct said institutions and give the board of directors the power to choose the best academic leaders from wherever they can find them.

This line of argumentative reasoning published in *El Mercurio* we also find in other publications such as the work of the former Minister of the Concertación Jose Joaquin Brunner, and the Dean of the University Diego Portales Carlos Peña (both writers for the newspaper), who maintain in their book *The Conflict of Universities: between public and private* (Brunner & Peña, 2011) that a condition the state could benefit from in state universities is that “these institutions be governed by the State and not prisoner to their internal academic corporations, as is unfortunately so common among them” (57).⁷

3.5. The public and the private in higher education

The last important issue among those disseminated by *El Mercurio* is one that refers in essence to universities. In the same book cited earlier (Brunner & Peña, 2011), briefly expressed in the thesis written by both analysts, is the issue that there are no reasons – save the respect for pluralism, something also achievable in some private universities – to privilege state universities with public funding. The basis for this position is in concepts they extract from neo-classic economics, in which both types of institution provide public goods and services, without it really mattering what the nature of the institution is, the rules that govern it or its institutional tradition, its “object purpose”, its “ethics” as Hegel would say. According to the

definition of the authors, the concept of a public good or service...

alludes to, from an economic point of view, a good or service that leads to indiscriminate benefits distributed among a large group of people, whether these people have paid or not the costs of producing them (...) scientific information, the general raising of basic knowledge, by that meaning the type of things the university produces are goods and services of that nature (...) there seems to be no necessary link between the concept of public and state universities. The reason is quite obvious (...) to produce in some form or other public goods and services and... aspire to state funding in the proportion to which they product them (Brunner & Peña, 2011: 53-53).

On this subject one of the few opinion pieces that express an opposing view is written by Aldo Valle, Dean of the University of Valparaiso. Titled “The public borders on the private” and published on the 29th of March 2014 Valle maintains that Chilean society recognizes the value of an educational system and mixed universities, both public and private. But that in recent decades state institutions have been diminished by the leanings toward privatization driven by the decrees of a dictatorial government. That is why, according to Valle, no one should be surprised by the objectives of the current government in its efforts to strengthen State universities. To him, what seems to be the intention is to keep these universities in diminished condition...

therefore what is hidden behind this overreaction to the efforts toward strengthening them is a fear or rejection of state institutions improving on their participation in the higher education system, of them increasing their scientific productivity and extending the capacity to generate ideas and participate in public debate (...) Such a rejection can only be justified if one considers that a country should not have a solid public foundation in education. However this also contributes to reinforcing the contrary idea of blurring the limits between public and private. If from a private perspective the objective is to contain

the public domain, then the distinction is not benign, unless the objective is to minimize the public sector in favor of the private.⁸

4. Conclusions

To conclude we will now refer to some of the aspects of the communicational debate on education in the months following Michelle Bachelet's acceptance of the Presidency toward the end of 2013. The first three bills proposed by the Government – apart from the previously mentioned controller – are attempts to end the for-profit purposes of education, which ends student selections and shared financing (between state and family) in the case of schools financed with government funds.⁹

The reaction of the newspaper *El Mercurio* to the aforementioned transformative bills has been confrontational and expressed through editorials, columns and interviews in which the newspaper has become even more united in its opposing stance. The same strategy used with the student movement is used here: a vast number of critical comments in which the standard bearers for the current educational model are raised, not just for the politicians and intellectuals of the right, but also intellectuals associated with the Concertación and the New Majority (a center-left electoral coalition). The subject matter is very similar: the defense of for-profit institutions that, in the worst of cases are of no consequence as far as educational results are concerned, the defense of subsidized education and the defense of student selectivity.

What is new at this stage is that communicational propaganda, plus the mobilization of owners and parents of subsidized schools and the political parties of the right have managed for the first time to organize mass protests – although it is true they are much smaller than those of the student movement – against the government's reforms. A significant part of these students are very wary and distrustful of the New Majority's government, its reforms – which are moderate – have no defenders mobilizing on their behalf.

What is now revealed is that it is not about the what, as it was in the 80s and 90s, "the right is winning" in education as Apple stated (1997) in the US and Great Britain. Their reaction reveals how quick masses can be organized to defend the educational status quo. Many of the social transformations driven by the dictatorship and then continued by neo-liberal policies in the governments of the Concertación "are becoming flesh and blood" in the lives and experiences of the middle sectors. They are going becoming quite significantly affected by fear and uncertainty in face of these reforms. The arguments we have described earlier and that were published in the newspaper *El Mercurio* we believe are certainly not foreign to us. In a sense we would talk of a certain hegemonic power inherent to post-liberalism which has managed to unite the right and governments in the defense of the current model under attack from the student movement.

Part of the new turn of events in the ideological climate, favoring the right, is forewarned in an interview published in the paper of one of the politicians that has defended ideological stances very similar to that of the student movement in the field of education. Senator Carlos Montes of the New Majority gave an interview to the paper. On the 28th of June 2014, the day before the interview was published under the rather meaningful title "Parents and school owners are afraid", *El Mercurio* had published another large report with photographs of multitudinous gatherings of parents, teacher and students of subsidized schools, in a montage with dramatic pictures of the damage done to schools in the student riots and take overs of public schools. The first pictures and comments inform the reader of an increase in marches and protests and how the people in these movements belong to subsidized schools and parent associations of subsidized and private schools. They depict marches, massive forums etc. The others report on vandalism, criminalize radicalized students: a very precise visual expression of the political effect *El Mercurio* would like to produce and a constant in the newspaper's communicational strategy when reporting on student movements.

It is in this context the newspaper interviews Montes on the 29th of June. The senator starts the interview with a warning that the period education in Chile is going through is tremendously complex and difficult “because it is a moment of structural change after a model that has been 34 years in place, and is not just ingrained in institutionalism but in the heads of many who believe this is the way things should function”. Montes’s statement is of seemingly great importance because what later beings to happen in the political debate on education is a more transversal rejection of a change to the model than what was previously speculated, and that the student movement is losing some of the support they had gained in their strategy as implemented in those years.

Important sectors once supportive of Michelle Bachelet in 2013 make of education a common cause with the right and come to the defense of credit and private education, generating a more profound consensus. Montes is perfectly aware of this twist within the hegemony...

Many people regarding education are afraid: the parents, the owners of these schools are afraid, the students, some, don’t know where it’s going, because they first proposed one thing that didn’t include other measures (...) I’ve seen it – he says in response to another question – in public schools, that there are many parents who themselves ask “if this is going to be, what private subsidized school am I going to send my children?”. And in private subsidized schools parents ask “If this is going to be free, why would I pay a part of the shared financing?”. There is obviously another problem being incubated here.

The more holistic idea we are trying to defend in this text, is that the debate in the press, and especially in the newspaper *El Mercurio*, those that defend the notion that free education is regressive, for-profit education is defensible and talk of the problematic nature of equality and democracy in education, have played an important role in this political twist, in this displacement of hegemonic voices. It has culminated in a serious threat to the unity of the New Majority. A government, partly divided, is facing off with a radicalized student movement, but has lost part of its

hegemonic strength in civil society. On the other side of the coin, we have a right wing that has become stronger yet with the support of the right wing factions within the New Majority. The result shows us that, despite the impact of the students marching in the streets, when it loses strength and becomes a little weaker, the old fears and former “common sense” that was made “flesh” in the time of the dictatorship and kept alive during the tenure of the Concertación reappear. These fears are now once again, “in the heads of many people” as senator Montes sagely states.

To conclude we must highlight that the results of the present study show that, during the period studied herein, *El Mercurio* gathered many intellectuals politically supportive of the center-left and its policies on education who have later been very critical toward educational reform put forward after 2011. These intellectuals have played a pivotal role in the articulation of elements in the common understanding of education, an understanding that has influenced private subsidized school parent and guardian movements. This has led to significant change in representation for subjects such as equality and gratuity in education which seemed, after 2011, to have garnered positive meaning in the field of education. Judging by the analyzed documents, these changes have had an impact and ultimately weakened the emerging paradigm of education as a social right, losing ground to the notion of education envisioned from a neo-liberal perspective, centered on return on investment, subsidizing demand and focalization.

Notes

1. This is the title of a documentary referring to the Chilean secondary school student resistance during the dictatorship of the eighties.

2. It is strange to evoke the authority of Rawls to defend a form of expenditure focalized on education of the poorest. Rawls theory of justice is a theory centered on equality, that does not accept justification of inequality, the liberal principle of “degrees open to talent”, the meritocratic equal opportunities, not

even the “natural lottery” of talent dependent on genetics. With great difficulty could this justice be compatible with a merely compensatory vision of poverty.

3. Atria expresses these ideas in for example his essay “What education is “public”?” in C. Bellei, J.P. Valenzuela et al, *Ecos de la Revolución Pingüina*, Universidad de Chile – UNICEF, 2010

4. These particular subjects have been dealt with in greater depth in a Work Document for the University Adolfo Ibañez in December 2011.

5. Williamson’s obfuscation seems to lend credence to another of Atria’s arguments not appearing in the debates in the press: the idea that we face a khunian paradigmatic crisis in education. If this is indeed so, Williamson’s defense is irrelevant because he argues with reasons that are only valid within the paradigm of his antagonist’s question, no outside of it.

6. An exception is the University Academy of Christian Humanism.

7. The relationship between higher education and democracy is a hotly debated topic. One must remember that in this sense, there are many different positions depending on the concept of democracy one chooses to defend. If the concept of democracy one believes in is elitist, in vein of Schumpeter, Sartori or Bobbio, then there is no space to talk of democracy

in universities. But if you defend a more participative conception of democracy, like that of C. B. Macpherson, Carole Pateman or Benjamin Barber, there is perfect sense to thinking of forms of self-government for universities.

The subject of the “capture” of institutions by their communities is probably derived from the works of James Buchanan and the American School of Public Choice, the premise being that there is no common interest in the institution, and what ultimately prevails are the selfish interests of its members. This is another extremely controversial Hobbsian premise that needs proving before being transformed into the basis of an argument.

8. As an added comment to the discussion, it must be said that the moment Bachelet assumed the presidency the government intervened in a situation involving a bankrupt university. A column in the paper (7 – V-2014) opposed state intervention based on the fact that it was a private university, which in this case was deemed exclusionary criteria for public intervention.

9. At this point we must remember that the Chilean school system, inherited from the dictatorship includes a private sector, a state-subsidized sector managed by private entities and is not compatible with a for-profit model, and a municipal state-funded system although the latter depends on municipal administration.

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¿ How to quote?

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