

# CEPAL

## Review

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UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

SANTIAGO, CHILE, AUGUST 1986

# C E P A L

Review

Santiago, Chile

Number 29

## CONTENTS

Note	7
Raúl Prebisch 1901-1986. <i>Aníbal Pinto</i>	9
Address delivered by Dr. Raúl Prebisch at the twenty-first session of ECLAC	13
Latin American youth between development and crisis. <i>Germán Rama</i>	17
Youth in Argentina: between the legacy of the past and the construction of the future. <i>Cecilia Braslavsky</i>	41
Youth in Brazil: old assumptions and new approaches. <i>Felicia Reicher Madeira</i>	55
The missing future: Colombian youth. <i>Rodrigo Parra Sandoval</i>	79
Chilean youth and social exclusion. <i>Javier Martínez and Eduardo Valenzuela</i>	93
The political radicalization of working-class youth in Peru. <i>Julio Cotler</i>	107
Youth and unemployment in Montevideo. <i>Ruben Kaztman</i>	119
Youth in the English-speaking Caribbean: the high cost of dependent development. <i>Meryl James-Bryan</i>	133
Thinking about youth. <i>Carlos Martínez Moreno</i>	153
Working-class youth and anomy. <i>Javier Martínez and Eduardo Valenzuela</i>	171
Youth as a social movement in Latin America. <i>Enzo Faletto</i>	183
University youth as social protagonist in Latin America. <i>Henry Kirsch</i>	191
Recent ECLAC publications	203

# Youth in Argentina: between the legacy of the past and the construction of the future

*Cecilia Braslavsky\**

The situation and prospects of young people have changed a great deal in Argentina in recent decades because economic growth has been meagre, political problems have become more acute and social mobility has decreased. Against this background, the author examines different factors in the reality of youth in Argentina, such as demographic evolution, regional inequalities, the special conditions of young women, the role of the family in the socialization of young people, the positive and negative effects of educational expansion and participation in the world of work.

In these circumstances, there are considerable differences between adult generations and the young generation, particularly in the challenges they must face. Present-day youth finds itself in a poor country whose process of stagnation is very difficult to reverse because of the fall in the prices of traditional Argentine exports; the loss of traditional markets, which has not yet been offset by gaining new ones; inflationary processes that were, until quite recently, uncontrolled, with consequent loss of confidence in a productive economy; and the search of social groups and classes for solutions. This new poor country also has approximately 40% more people than it had 20 years ago and a foreign debt of US\$ 48 billion, which previously did not exist. Young people are the principal heirs of this poverty, but also one of the potential social actors for surmounting it.

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## The situation of contemporary Argentine youth

It is well known that Argentina is one of the Latin American countries whose society went through a process of capitalist modernization at an early date. It preceded other countries of the region in achieving urbanization, industrialization, secularization of important aspects of social life, electoral participation of the population as a whole and access to primary education, as well as to other goods and services to meet both basic needs and needs that arose through modernization itself (Germani, 1965). It is less well known that present-day Argentine young people were born, raised and now live in a "crystallized" social scenario, that is, a society in which the spaces available to youth are almost the same as in 1960.

This crystallization of the social structure was basically caused by two factors. In the first place, a relation of dependence on the most industrialized countries was accentuated and, in the long term, had a negative impact on modernizing processes. In the second place, the political system was unable to promote qualitative progress towards bigger and better self-sustaining production, which would have expanded the spaces linked to such production and would also have redistributed its benefits with growing equity. Such inability of the political system stemmed from its power groups' lack of interest in achieving such goals, from persistent instability, from some groups' successive blocking of other groups' attempts to mobilize, and from social disturbances triggered by the demands of extremely numerous groups of the population who could find no channels to remodel the political system and initiate the changes required. From 1953 to 1983, civil and military governments alternated and were unable ever to keep together for more than three consecutive years a government team with medium and long-term strategies capable of generating dynamic social progress equal to that of preceding periods (Cavarozzi, 1983).

Although it may be said that the social structure of Argentina began to crystallize approximately 25 years ago, that was not the case with the system of relations among individuals and groups and particularly with styles of interpersonal and group relation. Between 1958 and 1983, ties of solidarity were broken, eminently competitive behaviour founded on individualistic bases spread and distrust and fear of society, and especially the State, developed.

Because of the crystallization of the social structure, young people become integrated into it in a manner quite similar to that of their parents, or at least with far fewer differences from adults than in the other countries of Latin America. The predominant trend in Argentine society is for the young generation to reproduce trends and differences that already existed in the intermediate generation (25 to 30 years of age)

and even many of the trends and differences that were evident in their parents' generation (45 to 55 years of age). This may be noted precisely in the existence among present-day young people of groups that are at least as different or distant from each other as those that existed twenty years ago. Moving somewhat ahead in what will be shown in the present article, the hypothesis may be formulated that, in terms of their social involvement, these groups of young people are quite similar to the groups of young people who were to become their parents and even quite similar to the different groups that may be distinguished among their parents. Naturally, the tendency for patterns of social involvement that already existed—and still persist—in adult generations to be reproduced in the young generation does not imply unchangeability or paralysis of social dynamics.

## II

### Number and distribution of youth in Argentina

#### 1. *Number and national origin of Argentine youth*

The youth population of Argentina is approximately one-sixth of the total population of the country (table 1), and amounted to 4 553 104 persons in 1980: i.e., much more than the total population of several Latin American countries. Slightly more than half of these young people are between 15 and 19 years of age, and slightly fewer than half are between 20 and 24 years of age. The former are more closely involved in their studies and have been greatly affected by the processes of the political freeze and social deterioration (particularly in education) over the past ten years. Nevertheless, they have greater possibilities of finding channels to compensate for the different losses of possibilities to which they were subjected. The latter are more autonomous, more closely connected to the world of work and have been

more affected by medium-term demographic processes and short-term economic processes. In Argentina, the youth population is on the increase, although with ups and downs and much more slowly than in the other countries of the region, while the population of elderly persons is increasing more rapidly. This demographic structure, together with some characteristics of the occupational, wage and social benefit structure of the country, indicates that the young people of today must not only be able to meet their own needs but must also be responsible for meeting a growing proportion of the needs of an increasing group of non-economically active adults. This can probably only be accomplished through a process of national capitalization, scientific development and consequent independent technological modernization, reactivation of production, administrative rationalization and changes in the social structure.

Table 1

**ARGENTINA: PERCENTAGES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE TOTAL  
POPULATION, BY SEX AND AGE, 1960, 1970 AND 1980**

Age Groups	1960			1970			1980		
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
15 to 24	16.1	15.09	16.3	17.1	16.6	17.6	16.3	16.5	16.1
15 to 19°	8.4	8.3	8.5	9.0	9.1	8.8	8.4	8.5	8.2
20 to 24°	7.6	7.5	7.7	8.2	7.5	8.8	7.9	8.0	7.9

*Source:* Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos, *Censo nacional de población, 1960*; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC), *Censo nacional de población, familias y vivienda, 1970* and *Censo nacional de población y vivienda, 1980*.

°The 1970 results were obtained through sampling.

A potential advantage that the young population has over previous generations in confronting this situation is that it is more homogeneous in origin. In contrast to the situation at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one, the vast majority of young people residing in Argentina are now second, third or fourth generation Argentines. Only 177 921 young people were foreigners in 1980 and, although from that date to the present time numerous Uruguayans, Chileans, Paraguayans, Koreans and young people of other origins have come to live in the country, the youth profile cannot have changed substantially in regard to national origin.

## 2. Regional inequalities and youth

One of the main objectives of Argentine society and State at the end of the past century was to make a population of extremely diverse national origins more homogenous. This objective has now been achieved. It is curious, however, that the young generation has not been able to take advantage of this achievement in order also to make its possibilities for social participation more homogeneous. The structure of regional differences tends to be as crystallized as that of social differences, so that it prevents young people from certain regions of the country from having possibilities for proper participation in national reactivation and, what is more, from

sharing in the benefits of such reactivation on even a halfway equitable basis.

The traditionally unequal and unintegrated development of the different regions of the country —made worse by the enormous distances, which have not been shortened sufficiently by agricultural settlements or proper road and rail infrastructure suitable for interregional communication— counteract the advantages of shared nationality and represent obstacles to shared identity.

The young people of the North-West (Catamarca, La Rioja, Tucumán, Salta, Jujuy and Santiago del Estero) share the problems of Andean peoples, such as the avidity of the climate and the land and great distances between towns in an isolated mountain atmosphere. Young people of the North-East, particularly those in the regions that border on Brazil, confront situations characteristic of areas sharing a border with a country that is developing more rapidly, producing more cheaply and penetrating culturally. Young people who live in many cities in Patagonia participate in modernizing trends that the other young people are completely unaware of. Those in Córdoba, Greater Buenos Aires and the Central Cordillera or Cuyana Area are the most affected by economic decay: the former by disindustrialization, the latter by the destructive processes affecting the regional economies. The young people of Córdoba and Buenos Aires may be distinguished, however, by their possibilities

**Table 2**  
**ARGENTINA: INDICATORS OF THE SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE,**  
**BY REGIONS AND PROVINCES, 1980**

	Total population	Youth (15-24) in the total popula- tion	Rural youth (15-24) in the total youth popula- tion	Young women devoted to household duties (14-24)	Youth with insuf- ficient educa- tion" (15-24)	Youth in the EAP* (14-24)	Youth who study (15-24)
	<i>Percentages</i>						
<i>Whole country</i>	27 947 446	16.3	17.0	31.2	19.7	47.4	30.9
Metropolitan Region	9 766 030	15.2	6.8	20.5	10.2	51.9	32.5
Federal Capital	2 922 829	14.4	-	12.7	6.2	48.8	39.5
Greater Buenos Aires	6 843 201	16.1	6.8	28.4	14.2	55.0	25.6
Pampa Region	8 012 080	16.0	21.6	33.2	19.3	49.7	27.9
Rest of Buenos Aires							
Province	4 022 207	15.4	0.3	29.4	14.0	51.6	31.4
Santa Fe	2 465 546	15.6	18.3	32.2	18.2	49.5	27.0
Entre Rios	908 313	17.0	32.0	37.4	25.6	45.3	27.5
Córdoba	2 407 754	16.6	23.8	30.4	17.1	48.6	31.2
La Pampa	208 260	15.8	33.7	36.9	21.7	53.7	22.5
Cuyo	1 876 620	16.9	30.4	35.0	21.7	45.2	31.2
Mendoza	1 196 228	16.6	32.9	35.8	21.6	49.5	28.1
San Juan	465 976	17.2	29.9	36.1	19.2	43.0	33.5
San Luis	214 416	17.0	28.5	33.1	24.4	43.2	32.1
North-East	2 247 710	18.6	39.2	42.3	40.1	44.4	26.8
Corrientes	661 454	18.7	32.8	36.5	38.1	40.5	30.5
Chaco	701 392	18.8	37.1	45.6	43.3	46.5	26.6
Formosa	295 887	18.2	40.6	44.5	36.8	42.9	26.1
Misiones	588 977	18.9	46.5	42.6	42.2	47.9	24.0
North-West	3 012 387	17.0	32.4	36.2	28.2	40.2	33.2
Catamarca	207 717	16.2	39.0	35.4	24.5	38.7	34.8
La Rioja	164 217	17.0	34.2	35.5	22.1	39.7	34.2
Tucumán	972 655	18.1	28.0	35.7	25.6	41.8	32.8
Salta	662 870	17.5	24.9	35.0	29.0	42.5	33.2
Jujuy	410 008	17.1	23.8	34.5	29.6	38.8	37.6
Santiago del Estero	594 920	16.4	44.6	41.6	38.8	40.1	26.8
Patagonia	1 032 619	18.9	17.2	35.6	24.3	53.4	23.6
Neuquén	243 850	18.7	22.6	37.2	32.1	52.8	22.9
Río Negro	383 354	17.2	26.7	37.2	32.1	51.6	24.7
Chubut	263 116	17.7	16.2	34.4	23.6	52.2	23.2
Santa Cruz	114 941	18.5	10.3	33.8	18.5	51.7	23.8
Tierra del Fuego	27 358	22.6	10.3	34.1	15.4	59.0	23.2

*Source:* Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, *Censo nacional de población y vivienda, 1980.*

\*Without education or with incomplete primary schooling.

Percentage of the young population incorporated into the EAP, with or without a job.

of receiving a heritage of greater participation and also opposition to participation: a fact which could provide useful lessons for overcoming the effects of decay.

Within the framework of the enormous regional differences, two facts affect youth in particular. The first is that although, in the country as a whole, only two out of every ten young people live in rural areas, in more than one-third of the 23 Argentine provinces (and particularly in all the provinces of the North-East) between one-third and half of the young people continue to be rural. The poorest provinces tend to have more rural youth, whose possibilities of education and work are, in fact, inferior and who must make greater integration efforts if they decide to participate in the search for other horizons (table 2).

This search for new horizons naturally takes place in different forms, according to the province of origin and the image that young people form concerning what is occurring in regions other than their own. It continues to be directed principally towards the Federal Capital,

Greater Buenos Aires and the large city of Córdoba, which all had positive youth migration figures between 1975 and 1980. Such migration is, however, probably prompted by an outdated image of the possibilities of social absorption offered by these cities. The latest thing in youth migration is the orientation towards Patagonia, consisting of the five southernmost provinces of the country (Rio Negro, Chubut, Neuquén, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego), which have rich mineral and tourism resources and greater political stability than the rest of Argentina, based in some cases on the leadership of provincial caudillos committed to local modernization projects. Patagonia was and is the target of national policies for regional promotion (exemption from taxes for new industries, increased zone allowances for civil servants, and so forth) which have made it a true pole of attraction for the population, although it has not yet surmounted its previous backwardness nor surpassed the greater attraction of some other regions of the country.

## HI

### The situation of young Argentine women

As well as the regional differences already indicated, there are pronounced differences in the social participation of the two sexes in Argentina. Sex-linked differentiation, however, lies above regional differences, since it is reproduced even in the regions that may be considered the most advanced.

The most important difference between young women and young men in Argentina is that 762 690 young women remain in a situation where they are exclusively in the home (Braslavsky, 1985b and 1985c), which means that the only social participation of all those women is within the family, where they are involved, to different degrees, in attending the other members of the family.

In 1980, more than three of every ten women from 15 to 24 years of age neither studied nor worked. Among them, a great many young women had no family obligations to occupy them in the home during the day, since they were neither married nor mothers. It is difficult to assume that all of them took care of younger brothers or sisters or of their parents. It is more likely that they were simply waiting to get married, as their only prospect of personal fulfilment.

Conservative concepts regarding the social place of women, transmitted through formal education (particularly through the family stereotypes disseminated in school books (Wainerman and Berck, 1984; Wainerman,

1983)) and through the values sustained by the most influential groups within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, are some of the ideological factors that inhibit the creative participation of young women in appropriate strategies to confront the challenges facing their generation. The percentage of such young women is very high for a country like Argentina. In addition to these ideological factors, there are certainly also structural difficulties in offering young women educational or work options, especially in the poorest provinces.

Both ideological and structural factors are frequently linked to the perpetuation of life styles typical of the concentration of power in strong local conservative oligarchies that sometimes revolve around influential provincial political parties. In other cases, such oligarchies are organized around sectors of the most important political parties in Argentina, which sometimes also maintain firm ties with local ecclesiastical hierarchies. Under such circumstances, religious instruction is still given in public schools, which have been under the administration of the provincial governments since 1978, while the content of curricula in non-religious subjects has not yet been secularized. These practices facilitate the penetration of concepts and values that indicate the home as the

only suitable place for female participation, apart from religious and educational institutions.

The chains of factors and the dynamics of politics that exist in some Argentine provinces make the percentage of young women who state that they dedicate themselves to housework one of the most valid, though least used, indicators of the differences among provinces. While only 6.1 % of the girls from 14 to 19 years of age and 14.3% of those from 20 to 24 years of age in the Federal Capital stated that their occupation was housework, the respective percentages reached 35.2% and 60.1% in EI Chaco, which is a province with high percentages of rural and Indian population, negative youth migration figures, frankly makeshift industrial development and the worst levels of schooling and education of the adult population in Argentina (table 2).

Undoubtedly, other factors also contribute to the transmission and acceptance of traditional values in the socialization of young Argentine women. One of them is the withdrawal of the population into private spheres, such as the family and religious groups, during periods in which public spheres have become aggressive and dangerous.

## IV

### Family and youth

The present-day youth of Argentina were born between 1955 and 1965. They grew up and became socialized in homes subject to intense changes, including notably: a) the shift of entire families or some of their members from rural to urban areas; b) the growing incorporation of women into the world of work; and c) the effects of increasing violence, particularly that of the State, and the consequent withdrawal of families into themselves as a result of daily life becoming more private.

Although, separately, all of these changes are common to one or another country of Latin America, their combination in Argentina resulted in some changes being contradicted by others, which produced a distinct and quite unique situation. Shifts from the countryside to the city and the growing participation of mothers in public life, either through work or in other forms (political parties, development associations, foundations, and so forth), may have helped to widen the gap between



generations, owing basically to the reduction in the time available to the adult generations for organizing joint activities, the decrease in shared social spaces and the participation of each generation in quite different spheres of socialization. In fact, in the parents' generation the weight of patterns of rural life was, for many, much more important than that of urban life patterns, whereas the socialization of young people took place mainly in accordance with urban patterns, even in the case of rural youth. Expansion of schooling, conceived in accordance with the characteristics of urban life, and of the mass media, where the countryside has almost no representation, contributed to urban socialization, which in many cases had its effect in advance: it facilitated the incorporation of nearly half a million young migrants into the cities at lower emotional and social costs (Cunha, 1986). The capacity of Argentine families to socialize the young generations was not reduced, however, and in recent years there have been no generational conflicts with broad social impact.

The absence of serious generational conflicts and the conservation and even reinforcement of the family's capacity to socialize young people is basically the result of daily life becoming more private between 1976 and 1983. This increased privacy was a social response to the increase in violence in public spheres and, particularly, to the increase in violence on the part of the State.

Violence was a constant in Argentine society from the end of the 1960s up to the early 1980s. It cannot be said to have eventually disappeared during this period: rather, the ways in which it was manifested changed. During the first stages, violence formed part of a social rebellion, or had the nature of a radical revolutionary youth manifestation with messianic components. Many justified different types of aggression on the basis of deep questioning of the dependent capitalistic nature of Argentine society, without however proposing clear alternatives shared by all those involved in such questioning. Gradually, this youth violence, with its revolutionary and messianic components, was defeated by the reactionary violence of para-State groups and the State itself, which further embroiled the general state of affairs by beginning the war of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas). Undoubtedly, each of the different

manifestations of violence that have upset society over the past 20 years has been different and should be analysed with different parameters. Nevertheless, all have at least two common traits that have direct consequences on families, young people and the relations between young people and their families. The first is that young people were the great leaders and the second is that, among families, violence helped to produce a climate of fear concerning the participation of young people in public life and growing apathy among young people themselves. The manifestations of youth violence that persist are of an individual nature or involve small groups and are associated precisely with such apathy. State violence also helped to reinforce young people's lack of confidence in State institutions as valid interlocutors. These processes lay at the roots of the greater privacy in daily life and the relative strengthening of family ties in comparison to other social ties.

The increase in the privacy of daily life was stronger than other processes that could have made young people more distant from their parents and could have caused the family to lose ground as a socializing agent. The family consequently played a leading role in the socialization of present-day young Argentines. It helped to save democratic social awareness and the cultural heritage from the advance of authoritarianism and obscurantism in public spheres, to orient some (extremely protected) forms of socialization outside the family in clubs and community and religious organizations, and to compensate in some way for the lack of social concern about the future job placement of young people. Although these processes of conserving democracy took place at the expense of also preserving certain prejudices and taboos, their main effect was that the few young people who were able to avoid the growing decadence of the educational system, to gain access to relatively privileged jobs in a context of growing unemployment and a breakdown in the labour hierarchy, and to assume leading political roles in the democratic transition process that began in 1963, did so thanks to their comparative family advantages, which allowed them to confront various situations in better conditions than other members of their generation.

## V

## Educational levels of young people

Present-day youth directly received both the benefits and the negative effects of the expansion of the educational system, which speeded up as from 1950, with priority given to primary education up to 1960, to pre-school and secondary education in the following decade and to higher or university education since 1970. During the last years of the military government, youth was also affected by the limitations imposed on some levels and key areas of the system, particularly the elimination of adult primary education, less expansion at the middle level, the closing of industrial colleges, and the policies of limiting university activities (Tedesco, *et al.*, 1984).

The expansion of the formal educational system was not accompanied by an equivalent improvement in performance. School drop-out rates at the primary and middle levels of the formal educational system continued to be very high, particularly in poor provinces and in rural areas. Thus, the school drop-out rate for the cohort of young people born in 1955 was 51.2%, rising to more than 70% in most of the provinces of the North-East and North-West, as well as in some of the provinces of Patagonia. Nine years later—that is, for the younger segment of today's youth—the drop-out rate had decreased, but the national average was still 47.8% and it reached more than 60% in all rural areas, except in some provinces of the Pampa region.

Throughout the time that this cohort was passing through the educational system, the quality of education deteriorated continuously. As early as 1972, primary school curricula, particularly in the Province of Buenos Aires, began to be restricted to the teaching of reading and writing in the first grades. This situation became critical some years later, when teaching more than 13 letters of the alphabet in the first grade was prohibited (Municipalidad de Buenos Aires, 1984). The results of this and other curriculum decisions became evident in the performance of 74 114 primary school leavers in the entrance examinations for secondary schools

throughout the country in December 1981 (these adolescents are now 17 years of age). On average, these results showed that they only had 60% of the language requirements and 29% of the required knowledge of mathematics. The tests were based on the curricula of fourth and fifth grades and not on those of seventh grade (*La Nación*, 1982). At the secondary level, the deterioration was even worse. The programmes in operation and the most commonly used textbooks were prepared in the 1960s. Computing, informatics, social history, economics and nuclear physics, for example, were only taught in the "best" public and private schools; some of these subjects were not even taught in universities either.

Young people who remained within the educational system for the same number of years were not necessarily equally affected by the decline in its quality. Because of the establishment of educational circuits or segments with different conditions for learning through different educational models, there were young people who formally reached levels of higher education, although this did not increase their possibilities of access to abstract thinking or to modern and advanced fields of knowledge.

A fact that is clear to researchers, but is disguised by everyday appearances, is that the segments that offer the best conditions for learning and that promote an educational model in which the acquisition of scientific knowledge and the practice of abstract thinking occupy a central position select their students in accordance with the latter's socio-occupational and educational origin. Through complex mechanisms that have been studied in detail in recent investigations, however, an apparent system of merit has been constructed in the education system which makes all those who go through the system believe that their progress depends on personal qualities, particularly intelligence and dedication (Braslavsky, 1985a; Filmus, 1986).

Deterioration in the quality of teaching through backwardness or stagnation in the content selected, when compared to the advance in overall knowledge elsewhere, finds its expression in the authoritarian ritual of school Ufe. School work became acting "as if" the children were learning, whereas actually they were only fulfilling a set of standard rites (Vecino, *et ai*, 1979). Authority was used to impose authoritarianism, the only way to maintain order among big groups of adolescents and young people in institutions which they were attending, for the most part, only to obtain a required credential, with no interest in the content being offered (Coleman, 1968).

Many of the processes described are now being modified. The expansion of some levels and key areas of the educational system has been revitalized; primary school curricula have been revised in several places in the country, and authoritarian practices in secondary schools and universities are changing. Argentine youth, however, has a profile and educational level that basically corresponds to what education was during the ten years prior to 1983.

The results of the educational model applied prior to 1983 are of two types: those of an objective nature and those that are linked to the creation of social awareness.

The most important five objective results are: an increase in the level of formal education of the young generation in comparison to previous generations (table 3); standardization of formal educational levels for both young men and young women and, in recent years, an upward trend in the level of women's education; a lack of correspondence between the average number of years spent in the educational system and the quantity and quality of knowledge acquired; inequality of education of young people

of different jurisdictions, geographic areas and social groups, even when their level of formal education is identical; and the persistence of insufficient education in significant groups of young people.

As regards the creation of social awareness, it may be said that young people who could not finish primary school, did not reach the secondary level or could not manage to enrol in the university are, for the most part, convinced that they have failed because they really are less capable. The selection of young people for access to successive levels within the formal educational system, as well as for remaining in each of these levels or for attending better or inferior establishments has functioned in such a way that it has played a strong legitimizing role: it has helped to produce attitudes of self-sufficiency or of mere conformism in many young people, depending on whether their passing through the educational system provided them with greater or fewer benefits than those of their peers. Differential formation of self-esteem began in this manner in primary school and continued throughout the entire educational system, which seemed to put those who were successful on one side and those who were not, on the other. In actual practice, it left only young people from low-income sectors on the side of the unsuccessful, although it allowed for the incorporation of a few of them into the other group.

The relation between the regional, social and educational situation of the population and the use of school opportunities was concealed from most young people by concentrating on school performance. On the basis of this distorted view of the educational possibilities offered by the society, many young people likewise justify the differences in their job opportunities.

Table 3

ARGENTINA: EDUCATIONAL LEVEL BY SEX AND AGE GROUP, ACCORDING  
TO THE 1960, 1970 AND 1980 CENSUSES  
(Percentages)

Age Group	Census	Sex	Educational Level					Total
			No education	Primary	Secondary	Higher or university	No special-ization	
5-9	1960	Male	30.6	69.4	-	-	-	100
		Female	29.7	70.3	-	-	-	100
	1970	Male	23.4	69.9	-	-	6.7	100
		Female	22.5	70.3	-	-	7.2	100
	1980	Male	12.3	87.7	-	-	-	100
		Female	11.8	88.2	-	-	-	100
10-14	1960	Male	4.9	84.8	10.3	-	0.1	100
		Female	4.7	84.6	10.7	-	0.1	100
	1970	Male	1.9	83.3	8.5	-	6.3	100
		Female	1.9	83.1	0.8	-	6.2	100
	1980	Male	1.2	83.5	15.3	-	-	100
		Female	1.1	81.9	17.0	-	-	100
15-19	1960	Male	5.2	63.4	28.7	2.5	0.2	100
		Female	4.9	63.7	29.4	1.9	0.2	100
	1970	Male	2.4	58.1	33.3	2.0	4.2	100
		Female	2.9	54.6	35.8	2.1	4.6	100
	1980	Male	1.6	46.0	48.6	2.9	-	100
		Female	1.5	42.7	50.9	4.9	-	100
20-24	1960	Male	5.1	67.0	20.3	7.4	0.2	100
		Female	5.7	69.1	20.9	4.0	0.3	100
	1970	Male	3.0	60.0	26.1	9.9	1.0	100
		Female	3.2	58.8	28.0	8.9	1.1	100
	1980	Male	2.2	49.5	35.3	13.0	-	100
		Female	2.2	46.5	35.8	15.6	-	100
25-29	1960	Male	5.6	71.1	16.9	6.0	0.4	100
		Female	6.4	74.7	15.5	3.0	0.4	100
	1970	Male	3.6	63.9	23.0	9.0	0.5	100
		Female	4.1	64.7	24.4	6.1	0.7	100
	1980	Male	2.7	54.4	29.3	13.6	-	100
		Female	2.7	51.9	31.3	14.0	-	100
30 and above	1960	Male	11.3	72.4	11.7	4.0	0.6	100
		Female	14.7	75.5	9.6	1.5	0.7	100
	1970	Male	7.5	71.9	14.8	4.8	0.9	100
		Female	10.3	73.8	12.9	1.9	1.1	100
	1980	Male	5.7	67.6	19.4	7.2	-	100
		Female	7.4	69.8	18.3	4.5	-	100

Source: a) Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos, *Censo nacional de población*, 1960. Volume I, *Total del país*, tables IÚ, B and 14. fe.) 1970: INDEC, *Censa nacional de población, familias y vivienda, 1970*. Results obtained by sampling, tabled, c) INDEC, *Cenm nacional de población y vivienda, 1980*. Volume I, *Total del país*, tables 4,7 and 8. Taken from Braslavsky, C. -and C Bersotti, *Proceso histórico de la superación de las desigualdades educativas de los jóvenes y mujeres en Argentina*, paper presented at the Regional Technical Meeting on Overcoming Educational Inequalities of Young People and Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, Panama, July 1983.

## VI

## Work and young people

In 1869, when the First National Population Census was held, 89.8% of the males between 15 and 19 years of age and 95.3% of those between 20 and 24 years of age participated in economic activities, while 64.2% and 65.9%, respectively of females were economically active (Recchini de Lattes and Lattes, 1975). Thus, the most widespread activity among young people of both sexes and both age groups was paid work outside of the home. As a result of expansion of the formal educational system and of transformation of the agro-export economy into an economy with an incipient and later heterogeneous industrial sector (which required a smaller labour force, but partly of a higher educational level), as well as changes in the social images of what were desirable activities for young people of each sex and each age group, there was a progressive redistribution of young people between economic activities (or work), study and staying at home. This redistribution should not be overestimated, however.

Most young people work. The proportions of men and women who do so are different, since many young women (although fewer than in past generations) tend to stay at home taking care of the house.

The most characteristic traits of the work of young people are as follows: the majority of young people, just like adults, are in a relation of dependence on a private employer or the State; they have also been affected by the tertiarization processes of the economy and expansion of own-account work; they are over-represented in jobs with fewer possibilities for personal fulfilment, union affiliation and wage prospects, and, within industrial jobs, they are not concentrated in any particular sector, but rather reproduce the distribution pattern of generations that came before them.

In 1980, 74% of the young people from 15 to 24 years of age worked in a dependent relationship, compared with a figure of 66% for the entire economically active population. The difference occurs because of the incidence of domestic employment, which constitutes 12%

of the employment of young people between 15 and 24 years of age and more than 30% of young women's jobs in this age group. The proportion of younger youth in a relationship of dependence was 71.5% and that of older youth, 76.3%. Data from permanent household surveys of 31 urban conglomerates show that 67.4% of the young people who worked were wage-earners in 1984.

In 1984, 11 % of the young people in the 31 cities included in the surveys worked on their own account or worked without pay in some dependent relationship (probably a family relationship). Many young people did not answer those taking the survey precisely, which implies that their situation was uncertain. Most of the young people who worked on their own account or without wages and did not know how to define their work situation precisely, as well as many of those who did receive wages, were in occupation groups that could be considered critical, as had already occurred in 1980.

The earlier young people are incorporated into the labour force, the greater the possibility of their joining occupational groups with no future. Owing particularly to the low educational level with which they begin to work, their jobs are limited to working as domestic staff, labourers, apprentices, factory hands, juniors or other unskilled activities. In 1980, young people occupied in these activities accounted for almost 24% of the economically active youth population, although the total number of workers in these activities accounted for only 8% of the total economically active population. Of the young people in these jobs, 50% had no formal education or had not completed primary school.

In spite of the progress in trends towards tertiarization of the economy and the large number of young people performing unskilled jobs, the most numerous youth occupation group is that of skilled industrial workers, accounting for more than half a million young people of both sexes. The distribution of young people among the different industrial sectors is almost the same as that of adults. For example, 22.5 % of

young skilled workers were employed in the metalworking industry in 1980, as against 21.5% of total workers. In the textile industry, the respective percentages were 4.2% and 3.2%. A comparison of the distribution of skilled workers in the different industrial sectors by age groups shows that there is no relation between differences in industrial employment and generational differences. This reflects at least three processes: a) industries hire workers according to criteria other than age; b) generations of workers are renewed within each sector; and c) the trend towards greater social mobility of the members of some sectors, for example the metalworking sector, is not necessarily linked to the presence of greater numbers of young people. Crystallization of the social structure, which was already mentioned, is also clearly evident, and socialization processes related to such crystallization may be inferred, particularly the existence of differentiated labour socialization mechanisms: parents in each industrial sector seem to overcome difficulties their children might encounter entering the industrial sector by transmitting work techniques and information concerning matters such as the operational, hiring and promotion mechanisms within the labour market sector to which they belong.

In addition to the general trends pointed out, the student worker or worker student category is growing among young people; unemployment is increasing and wages are deteriorating. Already in 1981, 65% of the students of the National University of Buenos Aires were working, and in 1982, 68% of the students of the National Technological University had jobs. The situation seems to be the same in the other tertiary and higher-level institutions. In 1984, youth unemployment in 31 urban conglomerates reached the record figure of almost 11% of the economically active population in this age group. Between March 1980 and March 1984, the proportion of young people within the group receiving the lowest wages increased considerably. In the Federal Capital in March 1980, 2.5% of the young workers earned up to 60% of the minimum wage and 8%, more than four times the minimum wage, but in 1984, 14.5% earned up to 67% of the minimum wage and only 1.7% perceived more than four minimum wages. This trend occurred in many other cities as well (INDEC, 1985).

The labour situation of young people is only a reflection of the labour situation of the population as a whole; it is no better and no worse and it is just one of the dimensions of the poverty now afflicting Argentina.

## VII

### Youth between the past and the future

In the introduction it was stated that Argentine youth now finds itself in a poor country. Its poverty is both material and political (Demo, 1985). Not only are resources insufficient to meet material needs, but political practices and concepts have also remained partially crystallized. Only after 1982, following the crisis of the Falklands (Malvinas) war, did some political parties, intermediate organizations and social groups begin to rethink what Argentina was. In this regard, the Partido Radical (Radical Party) appeared to young people to be the bearer

of an attractive response which was oriented towards non-violent social dynamics to settle social conflicts, towards support for the strengthening of ties of solidarity and the modernization of the economy, as well as towards changes in certain policies that affected young people in particular. In this last sense, it included the elimination of obligatory military service and of university entrance examinations in its 1982 pre-election platform.

After the Radical Party came to power, measures coherent with some of its proposals

were taken. In the case of those specifically directed towards youth, obligatory military service was reduced in several ways (although not eliminated) and free access to universities and to the degree programmes that each young person wished to study was granted. At the same time, the State promoted a proposal of "modernization", whose content has not yet been fully defined. In principle, it seems to consist of creating favourable conditions for productive investment, promoting exports and supporting reforms that will contribute to increased productivity in certain branches of industry, as well as for rationalizing the tertiary sector and particularly public employment. Briefly summarizing the government proposal, it may be said that it will attempt to surmount material poverty through production modernization and political poverty through non-violent participation in institutions that have been persecuted for many years, especially the youth groups of political parties and student centres. It will also indirectly favour the participation of young people in the organized labour movement, through the unions.

There is a risk that the form taken by modernization will not contribute sufficiently to the generation of conditions favouring a type of national development that is less dependent on large economic units and corporations. In this regard, it seems particularly necessary to produce a firm scientific and technological structure that can serve as a half-way point between the advanced technology of the highly industrialized countries and that of Argentina, and to go more deeply into the search for independent avenues of scientific and technological development. Likewise, it also seems necessary to increase all the measures to keep capital in the country.

The participation proposal has undoubtedly been accepted by a significant proportion of young people. During the years immediately prior to 1983, the most widespread form of youth participation was through music. By attending festivals of "Argentine rock" held in enclosed areas, songs prohibited on mass media could be heard; increasingly, themes of protest were accompanied, and sometimes replaced, by themes of love for life, solidarity, hope and peace (Vila, 1985). Since 1982, many young people

have begun to participate in the political parties. Today, their presence is significant in the two large traditional parties, the Partido Radical and the Partido Justicialista, in other minor parties and also in two new parties which seem to suggest that the present particularly attractive options for growing groups of young people because of their clear and homogeneous ideological lines: the Unión de Centro Democrática, where there is a strong influence from the "new right", and the Partido Intransigente, which appears as an option for the anti-imperialist left, although it is more closely linked to previously existing styles and concepts.

In the context of the deep segmentation affecting Argentine youth, the trends referred to above could lead to sectoral modernization which would only benefit youth groups of specific industrial and services sectors. The process of direct entrance into the universities also presents some problems: it was introduced without the parallel creation of job sources with sufficient wages and on-the-job training possibilities, which would have provided an alternative to young people, in a situation where working conditions (and particularly wages) of university researchers and teachers were deteriorating: a teacher in charge of a course, for example, receives between US\$ 60 and US\$ 250 a month. These circumstances make it impossible to be optimistic about the processes of restoring scientific and technological capacity. The persistence of a strong outflow of capital also precludes any expectation of significant capital accumulation in Argentina.

Youth can become an important actor in tackling future tasks, in participating in social dynamics and in helping to prevent a type of modernization that would involve the risks pointed out above. For this purpose, young people need to change and to overcome some of the legacies of the past (Rama and Faletto, 1985). In principle, these legacies are: the weakness of young people's common identity; their lack of confidence in public spheres, whether social or political, which is reflected in the participation of very few young people in student centres, political parties, development associations, union commissions, and so forth; the small amount of knowledge acquired and its

obsolescence; the predominance in some groups of practices that foster competition for individual advancement or confrontation in the political struggle, rather than espousing solidarity and co-operation; the penetration of harmful and conservative concepts in some groups, particularly among young women; and the lack of the training needed to solve some problems independently, together with a certain tendency to make excessive demands on those whose roles complement their own (teachers, for example). Young people have a significant background attesting to their capacity for change, such as, for example, the activities of the Political Youth Movement (Movimiento de Juventudes Políticas), which has striven, ever since it was formed, to surmount political practices of mutual opposition and to produce constructive and consensual forms of settling conflicts; volunteer participation in activities such as adult literacy programmes and assistance in running free clinics, at different times in the country's history; solidary actions undertaken within the framework of "Priority: Youth" (Prioridad, Juventud) in the church; values spread by some currents of the "Argentine rock" movement; the organization of parallel academic activities when those existing were considered deficient; and clear preference for

academic quality on the part of young people who have participated in selecting personnel to fill university teaching posts, when statutes call for their participation.

Finally, it should be added that this process cannot replace special government policies for youth aimed at solving precisely those problems that young people, and particularly those with limited material and educational resources, cannot solve for themselves. Before formulating any other type of policy aimed at youth, government agencies should consequently give priority to addressing the problem of growing unemployment among young people (which is of course not unrelated to the rising unemployment of adults) in conjunction with private enterprise, whose companies employ the highest percentage of young workers.

The problem of unemployment, and particularly of youth unemployment, is new in Argentina. It may be only a passing phase, or it may become chronic. In the latter case, Argentina will have divided its youth even more deeply and the dividing line will be between the generation of modernization, on the one hand, and the generation of the unemployed, on the other. The impact that such a situation would have on democratic stability is unpredictable.

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