

Workshop “Paper Leviathans”. Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., September 18-19, 2009. Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain, September 10-11, 2010.

**Between ‘Empleomanía’ and the Common Good:
Successful Expert Bureaucracies in Argentina (1870-1930)***

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* I would like to thank Magdalena Dormal for her excellent work in selecting and preparing bibliography for this paper. I greatly appreciate comments by Agustin Ferraro, Miguel A. Centeno, and other participants of the workshop “Paper Leviathans”.

The republics of the Southern Cone, or at least those known as the “ABC countries”, were not “paper republics” as U.S. and European commentators liked to say. They were republics with a significant state apparatus, administered by expert with well-defined public policy objectives. These expert bureaucracies, themselves the product of an elitist merit system, promoted the distribution of public goods among the population of these republics. Liberalism, redefined and energized by the new imperatives and ideals imposed by expert communities, served to enhance the sphere of state interventions to an extent unimagined by classical constitutionalists and liberal theorists¹. In Argentina, an activist federal state intervened in the core areas defined by liberalism: education, public health, justice and public order.² In the fields of education and public health, the expert elites of the conservative order (1880-1915) did extend the reach of the state. For the sake of the common good--the freedom from disease and the right to basic education associated with the exercise of citizenship--, the federal state made elementary education compulsory and introduced regulations to prevent the further spread of infectious diseases.

In this paper, I reconsider the relationship between expert bureaucracies and the provisions of basic services constitutive of the “common good” in Argentina. I focus in particular on elementary education and public health during the Conservative (1880-1915) and Radical administrations (1916-1930). The essays suggests the existence of a necessary connection between the provision of public goods and the expansion of state bureaucracies. In the case of elementary education, the paper argues, the pursuit of the “common good” created bureaucracies that in the end became an asset of and prey to political favoritism. To combat illiteracy the state depended upon an “army” of teachers, who in turn studied in colleges (*escuelas normales*) that distributed jobs among the middle-class, often through political favoritism. Thought the critique of this form of

¹ Refer to literature in state bureaucracies and public goods: Uruguay, Chile and Brasil

² Recent historiography has emphasized the relative autonomy of intellectuals and experts in the making of public policy, even during the so-called Oligarchic Republic. See Nieburg-Plotkin, *Intelectuales y expertos* (2004), Zimmermann, “Los intelectuales, las ciencias sociales y el reformismo liberal” (1992) and *Los liberales reformistas* (1994), and Lvovich-Suriano, *Las políticas sociales en perspectiva histórica* (2006). About the activist interventionist of liberal elites see S. Palermo, “Del Parlamento al Ministerio de Obras Públicas” (2006).

politics (política criolla) started during the conservative administrations, the practice became widespread during the Radical governments of Yrigoyen and Alvear.

Contrary to contemporary assessments of the “oligarchic republic,” the political leadership of the *orden conservador* had a progressive side and were concerned with the common good. To reduce infectious and endemic diseases and to educate the illiterate were first-order concerns to the expert elites since the early 1870s. It was so to the leaders of the hygienic movement since 1871 (the yellow-fever outbreak), and also to the promoters of common education, since Sarmiento commanded the Education Department of Buenos Aires province in the mid-1850s, or since the passing of the first provincial Law of Common Education in 1872. The program of “education for all” had an earlier start than the program of public hygiene, yet the commitment of both expert communities was equally strong. More importantly, both managed to attract sufficient public attention to their programs, mobilizing important segments of the population in support of their causes. Retrospectively, one could confidently argue that the Conservative and the Radical republics established the basis of a proto-welfare state, which was substantially expanded in the 1930s and later claimed by Peronism as “its” historical contribution to the making of modern Argentina.

The progressive leadership that conducted public policies in early 20th century Argentina had to operate within a political environment dominated by política criolla, a combination of party clientelism, nepotism, and empty rhetorical republicanism. Within this context, the distribution of common education often served to promote the practice of empleomanía. In addition, the relative “success” of expert bureaucracies was predicated upon a growing centralization of power in the Presidency and in the Capital city. To this extent, expert bureaucracies were complicit in the distortion of Argentina’s federalism and can be said to have contributed to the domination of Buenos Aires over the interior provinces.

On the other hand, these expert bureaucracies (educators and public health reformers) designed important institutions that interacted quite effectively with civic society. In the promotion of the ideals they sought to realize--basic education for all and standards of morbidity/mortality similar to those of the industrialized countries—educators and physicians were conscious of the need to involve the common public. Physicians and

educators organized and directed large civic society associations that cooperated with state agencies.³ To this extent, their interventions expanded the sphere of public opinion, a crucial dimension of democratic governance. Despite their distinct ideological leanings (Catholics, conservatives, liberals, populist republicans and socialists), expert elites were able to reach a consensus about the need to provide basic public goods if Argentina was to become a modern and progressive nation. Though historians will continue to debate the contributions of professional elites in Argentina during the *Belle Epoque*, their institutional legacy was quite impressive to contemporary observers. It remains visible today. Argentine public hospitals and schools still carry the names of their founders: the physicians and educators of 1880-1920.

Even though the bureaucracies enhanced state powers of surveillance over the population, limiting to this extent individual liberties, these institutions operated with a minimum of corruption. Until the mid 1910s, the professional bureaucracies who directed the leading education and public health institutions were exemplars of transparency and professional commitment. With limited public funds, they designed effective mechanisms for the control of resources and for the provision of services—“accountability,” in the modern political science lexicon. These professionals invested their reputation in the building of institutions and in providing services they considered essential for the welfare of Argentines. To them, the quality of these services was as important as the quantity, a criterion that proved difficult to sustain later under populist political regimes.

In the first section, I discuss briefly the way in which the Conservative Republic incorporated the advice and work of professional elites in the areas of common education and public health. Next, I examine the emergence of a critique against the persistence of *política criolla*, a residue of *caudillo* politics said to have contaminated the institutional set-up of the republic. Empleomanía—the use of public employment as a reward for political support—was one of the more objectionable practices of this period. Rather than decline, this practice increased with the democratization of public life brought about by the Electoral Law of 1912. In the following two sections I present a

³ . In addition to the two centralized state institutions that directed public health and educational policies (the Departamento Nacional de Higiene (DNH) and the Consejo Nacional de Educación (CNE)), they created powerful civil associations to fight disease and local school councils to monitor provision of elementary education.

summary view of the achievements and shortcomings educational and public health institutions and policies. Next, I review contemporary accusations of use of state employment for political purposes during the Radical administrations. In the final section, I return to the connection between public policies and empleomanía, summarizing findings and posing questions for future research.

EXPERT BUREAUCRACIES DURING THE CONSERVATIVE ORDER

The indictment leveled against liberalism that the leadership of the Conservative Republic, besides its rhetorical emphasis on the defense of civic liberties and private property, did not promote the common good, is at this point difficult to sustain. The building of a nation-state implied the construction of an important bureaucracy and its corresponding governmental sovereignty over the population. To build the republic of “order and progress” that liberals and conservatives had envisioned, state bureaucracies needed to promote the diffusion of public goods: elementary education, public health, and social order. To the Generation of 1880, the attraction of European immigration, the building of railroads, and the promotion of export agriculture were crucial for the construction of “progress.” But these policies were deemed insufficient to build a modern nation by the following administrations. The development of individual rationality, contractual relations, and a sense of national belonging were also essential to Argentina’s modernization and governability. This required policies, regulations, and interventions not so consistent with the idea of a minimalist state.

The governing elites of the Conservative Republic were quite conscious that, in order to achieve their goals, they needed to provide citizens with a limited number of public goods that, by necessity, would improve their living standards. Among these public goods, none were more important than justice, common education, and sanitary reforms. The justice system would contribute to establish a legal order and, to this extent, legitimate property rights and minimize social conflicts. Elsewhere, I have discussed the important role played by the judges and criminologists in the framing of state institutions (prisons, police, and criminal courts) needed to contain social disorder and

inter-personal violence.⁴ Here I examined the collective work of educators and public health reformers to prove a similar point. That is; that these expert elites were quite influential in the framing of public policies and relatively successful in distributing crucial public goods.

If we agree the three components of the modern Human Development Index—namely, literacy, life expectancy, and real income—represent crucial ingredients of the standard of living, we need to acknowledge that the public health and educational bureaucracies of *Belle Epoque* Argentina did promote the elevation of people’s welfare in at least two of these components: elementary education and public health.⁵ Even authors who criticize the political and economic elites of the Conservative Republic agree that these elites disseminated ideals of the common good that included at least these two ingredients: education for all; and basic sanitary reform.

As D. Armus argues convincingly, the anti-TB campaign was a model of state intervention in the life of cities and also a clear sign that the leadership of the conservative republic participated in the ideology of the “common good.” The campaign against tuberculosis gathered an impressive support from both elites and the general public. Reformers from distinct persuasions converged into a single movement that attained sufficient consensus to claim the resources and the institutions needed to fight the spread of the disease. As a result, a “medico-administrative bureaucracy” endowed with enhanced social power was formed, as a network of physicians acting with a relative autonomy from political parties and economic elites.⁶

In this essay, I examine the validity of the following four propositions:

- (a) That expert elites took control of the design and implementation of public policy in at least two crucial areas affecting the common welfare of the Argentine population: elementary education and public health;
- (b) That in the pursuit of these two basic policy objectives, they managed to mobilize the support of public opinion and civic society, contributing to create a

⁴ Salvatore, “Surgimiento del estado médico legal” (2001) and “Positivist Criminology and State Formation” (2005). See also Salvatore, *Subalternos, derechos y justicia penal* (2010).

⁵ Hygienic measures to decrease the incidence of infectious disease are usually the most expedient way to reduce infant mortality and increase life expectancy.

⁶ D. Armus, *La ciudad impura* (2007), pp. 275-77.

public awareness about the need to acquire basic reading and writing skills and about the importance of fighting infectious diseases;

- (c) That these expert communities were relatively successful in attaining their original goals in major cities, although important obstacles prevented the spread of these sanitary and educational improvements to the whole nation;
- (d) That these expert bureaucracies tended to be austere and efficient in the management of public funds, creating systems of control and administration that ensured that educational and health services reached the intended beneficiaries;

The counterpart of these successful public policy interventions was evident in the political sphere. In spite of the rapid economic and technological modernization attained, the country's politics remained contaminated by personalist leaderships, factionalism, and clientelism. Grandiloquent speeches, the rhetorical defense of abstract principles, and a recurrent cult to the Fatherland formed the great screen of a real-politik based on agreements among notables and party factionalism. Politicians, once in office, resorted to state revenues to favor relatives and friends and distributed state employment as reward for political support. Rent-seeking and *empleomanía* were the darker sides of a political life that also provided basic public services and promoted cooperation for the common good. The expert elites of the Conservative Republic worked at the service of political structures (parties and alliances) that acknowledged *política criolla* as a reality resilient to change. This situation worsened with the expansion of the political franchise. Thus, a fifth proposition needs to be added to the previous four:

- (e) That this period witnessed an increasing use of state employment as an instrument of political reward and party clientelism. This particular illness of the republic, empleomanía, would gradually corrode the foundations of the administrations built to deliver education and public health.

What I want to emphasize in this paper is that the systematic efforts to distribute public goods in the areas of common education and public health enlarged the size of state bureaucracies without the corresponding emergence of a merit system. The leadership of the Conservative Republic failed to create mechanisms to ensure that state employments were distributed according to merit. This oversight permitted the dissemination of empleomanía. The practice of rewarding political clients or electors

with appointments in the federal or national administration became widespread during the presidencies of Hipólito Yrigoyen and Marcelo T. de Alvear (1916-1930).⁷ Functionaries got accustomed to grant state employments on the bases of political favoritism, family relations, or sheer political discretion.

Educators and public health reformers constituted two expert communities which had important things in common: they both influenced public policies; they both managed to mobilize public opinion in the support of common education and sanitary reform; they both built impressive professional and civic-society institutions to promote their objectives. There were, however, crucial differences between the two expert bureaucracies. The Consejo Nacional de Educación was granted financial and administrative autonomy since the beginning, while the Departamento Nacional de Higiene received unstable revenues and little of national authority. In addition, hygienists had to deal with various endemic, epidemic, and annually recurring diseases whose cure was still in the process of discovery. Educators, on the other hand, had a well-defined objective: reducing illiteracy, and there was a clear consensus about how to achieve it: with common schools. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that educators were more successful than public health reformers in the achievement of their objectives.

Doctors and educators were not two competing expert communities. On the contrary, they coincided in their visions of society and the role of the state and often interchanged positions in the state bureaucracy. Eduardo Wilde was minister of public instruction before assuming as president of the Departamento Nacional de Higiene. The same could be said of J.M. Ramos Mejía: the president of the Consejo Nacional de Educación who was also the first president of the Asistencia Pública, perhaps the first modern public health facility of the city of Buenos Aires. The convergence of interests between educators and public health reformers produced important synergies. The national school system created a medical school service, and elementary-school teachers assumed a chief role in the diffusion of hygienic habits among the population.

⁷ Though it is likely that the conservative governments of the 1930s continued and even intensified this practice, at the moment we do not have conclusive information on this point.

THE PERSISTENCE OF “POLITICA CRIOLLA”

At the time of the Centenary (1910), critics coincided that one of the unsolved problems of modern Argentina was the persistence of *caudillismo* under the cloak of republican representative politics. To positivist writers (Agustín Alvarez, José María Ramos Mejía, Carlos O. Bunge, among others), the colonial heritage of racial miscegenation and *caudillismo* had produce forms of political leadership and competition that were only republican in form. Underneath these political forms lie cultural understandings that contradicted the principles of clean electoral competition, government for the common good, and respect for the division of powers. In his Manual de Patología Política (1899) Agustín Alvarez described at length the features of this inherited premodern trait he called *politica criolla*. Though claiming to represent the interests of the public, politicians acted instead defending the particular economic interests of a few families or economic groups. Their recitations of democratic-republican principles were empty rhetorical exercises. As the masses tended to follow political bosses for the wrong reasons—rewards in state jobs or special political favors—politicians were not inclined to persuade them with rational arguments.⁸

Socialist Juan B. Justo is said to have popularized the term *política criolla* during the debates of the electoral bill of 1912. To Justo, *política criolla* was a game among notables; “metropolitan *camarillas*” competed among themselves for control of state revenues, assisted in their endeavor by servile local political bosses. Working people were mere spectators in this elite electoral, rent-seeking game. Traditional political parties supplied the public with abundant republican rhetoric, yet real politics consisted in arrangements among notables (*contubernio*). A consequence of this type of political competition among elites was the growth of the state bureaucracy, for factionalist parties used the civil service to reward their followers. Once in office, political parties considered state employments as their private turf, in many cases firing state employees who sided with the opposition.⁹

⁸ Positivist essays on the “national question” and on “política criolla” are examined in Terán, Positivismo y nación en Argentina.

⁹ Justo’s writings on “política criolla” and “bureacratic parasitism” are discusses in Rodriguez Tarditi, Juan B. Justo Parlamentario, 1934: see specially, pp.57-67 and 128-30.

Before Justo, liberals and conservatives themselves had raised concerns about the persistence of *política criolla* in the republic of progress. Already in 1899 Agustín Alvarez had explicitly discussed this political illness as characteristic of the young Latin American republics. Others of his generation addressed the same problem using different terms. Lucas Arrayagaray and José M. Ramos Mejía were convinced that the racial composition of the Argentine lower classes and the conditions of mass politics were not conducive to republican representative government. In the midst of economic modernity, the masses continued to follow caudillos who promised them a better living without the corresponding work and effort.¹⁰

Scholars have examined this feature of politics under the names of political favoritism, electoral venality, or machine politics.¹¹ Most of them had looked at the radical administrations of the period 1916-1930, focusing on the question of whether or not parties gave material rewards to voters and with what effectiveness. Save for exceptions, these works have failed to examine the impact of clientelistic politics on the expansion of state bureaucracies. None have reflected upon the relationship between the provision of public goods and the problem of empleomanía. The most recent contribution has concluded that, as far as the municipal government of Buenos Aires is concerned, all political parties used patronage promising a public employment in exchange for electoral support. Though promises of jobs did not get H. Yrigoyen elected or sustained his popularity over time, his populist policies tended to increase municipal budgets beyond what was warranted by population and income growth.¹²

One of the politicians accused of reviving the tradition of *caudillo* politics was Hipólito Yrigoyen. The first president to be elected by the secret ballot implemented after the electoral reform of 1912, Yrigoyen came to office promising a substantial moral uplift to the institutions of the republic. Instead, as his critics affirm, he brought unprecedented doses of corruption, political favoritism, and arbitrary centralism. His administrations were marked by repeated federal interventions to the provinces and various corruption scandals in congress. More importantly, his populist politics

¹⁰ [citar obras de Arrayagaray y Ramos Mejía]

¹¹ See Cantón and Jorrot, “Buenos Aires en tiempos del voto venal” (1999); David Rock, “Machine Politics in Buenos Aires” (1972); and Joel Horowitz

¹² J. Horowitz, “Patrones y clientes,” 2007.

disrupted the little meritocracy that the conservatives and liberals had established within the state bureaucracy prior to 1916.¹³

To Benjamín Villafañe, a conservative politician from Jujuy writing in the mid-1920s, Yrigoyen had eradicated meritocracy from the public service.¹⁴ Public employment, previously considered an honor and duty to be performed by qualified personnel, became a gift to be distributed among the followers of the Radical Party, most of them people without instruction or professional degrees. According to Villafañe, Yrigoyen had filled the Postal Service, the Customs Office, the state railway companies, and other state agencies of the federal government with inept employees, if not delinquents (*gente del hampa*).¹⁵ *Radicales* had transformed state employment into a party booty. People lacking education and reputation came to office, not to serve the common good but to distribute rents and government jobs among their friends.¹⁶

Party favoritism—and not merit—dominated the allocation of public positions.¹⁷ In the provinces, Villafañe denounced, there were radical deputies who had been in prison for cattle rustling, police officers operating gambling businesses, and illiterate peasants appointed as “sanitary agents.”¹⁸ More important to our purpose was the accusation that Yrigoyen had appointed people without instruction as directors of schools and colleges, in reward to their electoral work for the party.¹⁹ In Villafañe’s view, Yrigoyen had destroyed the merit system in the state bureaucracy.

¹³ See references to the historiography of the period in the section “Empleomania in the Radical Republic.”

¹⁴ Villafañe’s accusations of corruption provoked important scandals at the time. He denounced the Yrigoyen administration for distributing rights to the exploitation of federal forests among friends, of using illegally the proceeds of the gold remittances to Argentine embassies abroad, of granting illegal concessions to railroads, etc.

¹⁵ So much so that some public offices became “nests of delinquents”. (Villafañe 1922: 61-62)

¹⁶ “Los gobernadores, diputados y senadores de cuño yrigoyenista, fueron espigados entre la gente del hampa. Todos sus gobernadores tienen rasgos inconfundibles: atropellan la renta, las legislaturas y los jueces; reparten los cargos públicos más delicados como un botín sin tener en cuenta la preparación ni las condiciones morales de los elegidos. A la representación nacional lleva diputados tales, que algunos estuvieron repetidas veces en la cárcel por delitos comunes.” (Villafañe 1928: 42)

¹⁷ Yrigoyen’s chief in the Casa de la Moneda, Luis Petenello, was a gambling entrepreneur, later indicted for the forgery of paper money.

¹⁸ A prisoner condemned for knife-fighting (a *malevo*), indulged by Yrigoyen, was found to be in the payroll of the government, as a priest in the military!

¹⁹ Villafañe, *Degenerados* (1928), pp.50-52, 55 and 172.

“Hirió de muerte la carrera administrativa, matando todo estímulo al posponer a la antigüedad y al mérito el favoritismo caprichoso para premiar a los instrumentos de comité, que como es notorio son gente de la moral más liviana. Así chauffers y obreros sin preparación o más bien dicho empresarios de huelgas, fueron premiados con cargos magníficamente rentados, careciendo de toda idoneidad.” (Villafañe 1928: 172)

Before we hasten to read the end of meritocracy as a sort of populist social leveling condemned by a displaced conservative, we should notice that socialists had raised the same concern a decade before Villafañe. In December 1914, before the rise to power of the Radical Party, socialist deputy Juan B. Justo argued that the extraordinary high cost of secondary education in Argentina was due to political favoritism. Normal schools, in particular, were costly undertakings “...because it is proper of a system of government that multiplies employments as a matter of personal favors...”²⁰ Political favoritism translated in an excessive number of *cátedras* or professorships in proportion to the student population. While in the United States normal schools function with a 20 to 1 student-professor ratio, in Argentina there were four students for each professor.²¹

In the congressional debates of 1913 Justo brought light to another aspect of empleomanía. In Argentina, he claimed, functionaries are greatly overpaid, earning higher salaries than in the United States. “Why this over-abundance of high public functionaries?,” he asked:

“Porque todos esos empleos se dan a miembros de la oligarquía o a sus parientes próximos, o a los esposos de sus hijas: porque el nepotismo reina en la administración pública. Y se comprende que esos empleos de gran remuneración y de holgazanería, porque no implican ninguna obligación concreta, sean los más solicitados, y los que los hombres de influencia tienden a multiplicar en progresión creciente. De ahí que aumenten sin límite, bajo las formas más variadas.”²²

²⁰ Justo, Educación Pública, 1930: 92.

²¹ Ibid.: 93.

²² Justo, La Obra Parlamentaria, 1913: 146.

Thus, what conservative Villafañe considered a widespread political practice of the Radical Party, socialist Justo had previously attributed to the governments of the Conservative Republic. This makes possible to argue that there was a continuity in the practice of empleomanía between the governments of the *Orden Conservador* (1880-1915) and those of the *República Radical* (1916-1930). One could imagine that, due to the expansion of the political franchise, the number of petitioners of public jobs increased significantly after 1916. Yet, there are reasons to think that empleomanía had its own expansionist logic, based on the need to expand political clienteles, that was common to conservative and radical administrations.²³

SCHOOLING FOR ALL

D.F. Sarmiento had a clear vision that the future of the nation rested upon the rapid dissemination of common education among the population. Elementary schools teachers carried the mission of transforming illiterate persons into citizens capable of making reasoned electoral decisions and of assuming civic responsibilities. Since the 1870s provincial and federal legislation carried into effect Sarmiento's vision.²⁴ The creation of the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* in 1881 and the gathering of the Pedagogic Congress the following year brought about a consensus about the need to provide common basic education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14. Educationists agreed on the basic criteria for common education: public instruction should be free of charge and compulsory; parents or tutors would be responsible for placing their children in school; students would be divided into grades according to age. Adults basic reading and writing skills should attend special schools. The draft for the common education bill was presented in 1883 and, after important debates over the question of religious instruction, enacted in 1884 as the Law 1428.²⁵

²³ It is interesting to notice that both Villafañe and Justo centered their criticism on the educational bureaucracy and not on the offices and facilities created by public health reformers.

²⁴ See Szuchman, "Childhood Education" (1990) and Campobassi, La educación primaria desde 1810... (1942). For a critique of the application of Sarmiento's vision during conservative regimes, see Spalding, "Limits of Oligarchic Reform" (1972).

²⁵ The non-clerical side won the day, prescribing that elementary schools should be free from religious instruction. For a summary discussion of the creation of the CNE, the Pedagogic Congress, and the enactment of the law 1420 see H. F. Bravo, A cien años de la ley 1420 (1985), 11-79.

To bring elementary education to all corners of the nation required a growing number of teachers. To this end, the federal government established several “normal schools” for teachers in the provinces since the early 1880s.²⁶ A few fellowships were allocated to help students finance their education. The shortage of teachers forced the CNE to shorten the training of teachers from four to three years in 1886. With time, additional normal schools were established: 46 between 1900 and 1915 and other 14 in the period 1916-25.²⁷ The graduates from these schools, the *normalistas*, constituted a professional corps committed to the ideal of reducing Argentina’s illiteracy to the levels of the most advanced nations in the world. Under the leadership of the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* many teachers joined the ranks, at the beginning without the habilitating degree, but towards the 1920s, the majority were *diplomados*. Thus, the number of teachers rose from 5,600 in 1890 to 19,900 in 1915 to 25,100 in 1930.

Through its journal, the *Monitor de la Educación Común*, the CNE was able to distribute pedagogic advice, class content, and educational ideals among teachers across the nation. In addition, the Consejo organized *conferencias pedagógicas* which trained teachers how to instruct children 6 to 14 in reading, writing and math. By the turn of the century, the goal of educating for citizenship was overshadowed somewhat by the new objective of assimilating or acculturating immigrants’ children, a new consensus called “patriotic education.”²⁸ Yet, teachers continued to view their mission as a civilizational enterprise, as Sarmiento had taught them. They had to bring children out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of rational thinking and practical knowledge.

The laws, institutions, and administrative solutions designed during the period 1870-1900 were remarkable, for a number of reasons. To avoid the interference of party politics, the CNE was granted full financial and administrative autonomy. A proportion of national and municipal taxes were allocated to the Consejo’s annual budget and a “permanent school fund” was established. These funds were to be deposited in a special account in the Banco de la Nación at the disposal of the CNE.²⁹ Local councils of parents were created to control the performance of teachers, the availability of teaching

²⁶ Before 1880, there were only two normal schools in the Capital, founded in 1874, and one in Paraná, established in 1869.

²⁷ Tedesco, *Educación y sociedad en la Argentina* (1986), p.210.

²⁸ See Escudé, *El fracaso del proyecto argentino* () and Spalding, “Limits of Oligarchic Reform” (1972).

²⁹ Consejo Nacional de Educación, *Cincuentenario de la ley 1420* (1938), tomo II.

materials, and the condition of schools. In spite of the federalism prescribed in the constitution of 1853 (ratified in 1860), which made the provinces responsible for elementary education, the system of public instruction was in practice quite centralized. The Consejo was granted ample prerogatives and effective instruments to make national policies be enforced in the provinces. The CNE was authorized to distribute subsidies (subvenciones) to provincial governments to finance teachers' salaries and school maintenance. Later, with the enactment of the Lainez Law (1905) the federal government was granted important funds to build "national schools" in the provinces. Since then, provinces could not claim that they lack funds to build elementary schools.

Legislation and financial arrangements contributed to the establishment of a single educational system throughout the nation. In the 1870s and 1880s, the interior provinces passed "common education" laws that replicated the pioneer legislation of Buenos Aires province. The Consejo's policy was to make the instruction received by children in La Rioja, Cordoba or Corrientes quite similar. Lainez Law's federal funding completed the alignment of the provinces to the national educational policy. The numbers of national schools in the provinces rose dramatically and so did the number of school children.³⁰

Later, in an effort to level across the nation existing differences in the quality of elementary education, the CNE made the hiring of graduated teachers mandatory. In addition, the CNE created a system of periodical school inspections to control the local investment of school subsidies and the application of standard teaching methods and programs. This policy created in time a small corps of "school inspectors." It was the duty of these school inspectors to produce reports of the actual progress of schools at the local level, so that the *Consejo* would be informed about the proficiency of teachers, the availability of teaching materials, and children's attendance to public schools.

In addition, the Consejo provided *conferencias pedagógicas*, practical classes in which senior teachers explained younger teachers how to better instruct children. After 1890 pedagogists began to favor "practical education" instead of the old methods based on memorizing and reading aloud. Through the observation and description of things (a

³⁰ The numbers of nacional schools in the provinieses rose from 291 in 1906 to 1,385 in 1916, to 3.527 in 1933. By 1933 over 316,00 children were attending "Lainez schools." C.N.E., Cincuentenario de la ley 1420 (1938), tomo II, pp. 216-217.

method pioneered by Pestalozzi in Europe), and through classes of *manualidades*, children could speed up the learning basic skills.

An impressive institutional design—based on basic criteria for common education, the centralization of national educational policy, the administrative and financial autonomy of the CNE, and an efficient system of information to monitor the learning process—produced equally impressive results. If in 1862 only 20.2 percent of school-age children attended school, by 1895 the proportion rose to 31.1 percent, and to 48.0 percent in 1914. By 1943, as the IV School Census proclaimed, the percentage of children ages 6-13 who attended school had increased to 75.3 percent. A total of 1.7 million children were receiving elementary education in public schools.³¹ The authorities of the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* had reasons to feel proud about the country's long-term achievements in elementary education. At the time of 1943 census, the rate of illiteracy among adults had been reduced to 15.3 percent.³²

There still remained important regional differences in school attendance across the nation.³³ In the interior, three provinces still showed an important proportion of illiterate youths: Corrientes (14 %), Salta (13 %) and Jujuy (13 %). The situation was even worse in the “national territories.”³⁴ Yet, the enormous gap in schooling that separated the Capital from the interior provinces at the beginning of the century had been largely reduced. Elementary education was by 1943 one of the more evenly distributed public goods.

Yet figures of school attendance and illiteracy did not reveal the whole problem. Many people had attended school but were functionally illiterate. As critics noticed, though basic literacy was imparted, few children completed primary school. The widespread use of children as workers or family help prevented children from completing the fourth to sixth grades. One of the more resilient problems was the high rate of school drop-outs.

³¹ IV Censo Escolar de la Nación, vol 1 (1948), p.136.

³² Of the population ages 14 to 21 there were 123,000 youths who had never attended school—only 6.6 percent of the age group.

³³ In the Capital 90.1 percent of children attended school, compared with 63.2 percent in Neuquén.

³⁴ The corresponding figures were: Neuquén 22 %, Chaco and Rio Negro 18 %, and Chubut 17 %.

República Argentina, *IV Censo Escolar de la Nación*, 1948, p.136-38.

In 1943, 35 percent of the population 14 to 21 had abandoned elementary school before completing 6th grade. This represented over a million youths.³⁵

After WWI, experts and politicians began to call attention to the fact that much remained to be done. In particular, they claimed, the program of common education had failed to carry literacy to isolated rural areas. This presented education administrators with various related problems. Drop-outs of rural school never received a moral education. After leaving the school, they entered occupations that required little reading or writing skills. Hence, young laborers tended to forget what they had learned at school. Pedagogists and politicians interested in education suggested various remedies to the problems of rural education and early drop-outs: from internment schools, to ambulatory schools, to intensifying adult education. And all encouraged the political class to continue the struggle for literacy, redoubling the efforts in terms of resources invested in schools.³⁶

In the 1920s and 1930s commentators noticed a new phenomenon that compounded the economic backwardness of the interior, the isolation of rural areas, and the persistent use of child labor. Graduated teachers (*maestros normales*) preferred to take positions near large or medium cities, rejecting jobs in schools in rural, frontier, or isolated areas. Teachers' salaries, originally considered sufficient in relation to other employments, began to decline in relative terms. As a result, more women entered the profession until elementary school teaching became an almost exclusive female employment.³⁷ In addition, the Radical governments had established a peculiar entry system based on seniority. Young teachers had to wait for years in the CNE's waiting list until they were assigned to a school.³⁸ The seniority criterion, combined with a perverse incentive system, proved in the long-run detrimental to the crusade for universal elementary education.³⁹

³⁵ The chief reasons of school drop-outs were the need to work (38 percent); the lack of 5th to 6th grades in local schools (10 percent); the negligence of parents (9 percent) and poverty (8 percent). Those who never attended school attributed this situation to the long distance from their homes to the nearest school, in addition to parental neglect and family poverty.

³⁶ A clear example of these warnings was the book by Cárcano, *800,000 analfabetos* (1933).

³⁷ Include statistics on female employment in education.

³⁸ As reports of the CNE indicated before the reform of 1932, most of the new appointees were 30 years or older. Seniority was the chief criterium for selection.

³⁹ In compensation for low wages, the teaching profession offered relative stability in employment and early retirement (25 years of service).

During the Radical administrations the number of school teachers grew in proportion to the enrollment, keeping student-teacher ratios almost unaltered (33-34 students per teacher). Yet the problem of double employments and the seniority system complicated the employment prospects for young teachers. Teachers retired from provincial schools signed up for an employment in the national schools. Wives of men holding middling positions, asked for a teacher position to compensate for the instability associated with their husbands' jobs. Men having jobs in commerce, industry, or the state administration, signed also for a teacher's appointment; their chief motivation was the pension system afforded by the CNE.⁴⁰

By 1940 the number of applicants to teaching jobs were so numerous that the CNE decided to conduct a census of *maestros aspirantes*. The commission estimated that, since 43,908 teachers graduated from normal schools between 1928 and 1937, and only 17,412 had appointments, there were 29,496 graduated teachers without employment. Yet, as many of them had other occupations, the commission estimated that there were 15,942 *desocupados absolutos* among graduated teachers.⁴¹ Curiously, the effect of empleomanía had generated by the late 1930s a surplus of teachers. The normal schools were producing more graduate teachers than the system could absorb.

Were these problems—double appointments, the aging of teachers, and declining opportunities for young graduated teachers-- associated with the practice of *empleomanía*? To a certain extent, it was. Over time, more teachers became more rent-seekers while fewer kept the missionary spirit. Several factors contributed to this outcome, among them: declining salaries, insufficient budgets, inadequate criteria for appointments, and the attraction of city life. The growing influence of local political caudillos in the appointing of school directors, inspectors, and professors of normal schools and national colleges proved detrimental to the merit system established at the beginning. Though the possession of a title became the norm for entering the CNE waiting lists, appointments were not allocated in relation to waiting time, but due to

⁴⁰ Teachers who started their career late in life had to work until their declining years, reducing the positions opened to young applicants.

⁴¹ Consejo Nacional de Educación, Inscripción y Censo de maestros aspirantes a cargo docente. Buenos Aires: C.N.E., 1940.

different types of favoritism. Thus, due to the political use of teachers' appointments, young *diplomados* waited in vain for a job.

This must have affected teachers' missionary spirit. Retirement-seekers and urban-dwellers working part-time were probably not so committed to the goal of "education for all" as the pioneer teachers of the 1880s. The democratization of political life that came as a result of the electoral reform of 1912 and the rise to office of a middle-class party (the Unión Cívica Radical) brought about a marked deterioration in the merit system in the state bureaucracy. In the teachers profession this deterioration was particularly noticeable. As the state let the purchasing power of teachers' salaries drop, the teaching profession became a niche of female employment, a second choice for men.⁴²

Parallel to this, the salaries and conditions of school inspectors and secondary school professors became more attractive. Hence, these positions were particularly sought by many middle-class families, in both the Capital and the provinces. Populist politicians who promised to deliver these *nombramientos* could amass an important political capital. Unlike the position of elementary school teachers, secondary school positions were distributed by the *cátedra* system, so that a person could accumulate as many courses as he/she could. Controls in this regard were lax, making possible for the incoming politician to take away *cátedra* hours from one person to give them to his favorites.⁴³ Though these corrupt practices probably existed since the early origins of the common school reform in the 1870s and 1880s, it is apparent that they became widespread in the second and third decades of the new century.

CONTROLLING DISEASE

The control of endemic and infectious diseases presented a more complex problem than reducing illiteracy. To begin with, disease was a monster of many heads. In addition to

⁴² The 1940 Census of Applicants for teaching positions found that 22,925 of the 25,705 applicants were women (82.8 percent). Most of them were graduated teachers (*maestras normales*), many of them were single, and the great majority (75.6 percent) lived in Capital Federal.

⁴³ Luis Roque Gondra, a "radical," complained that the government of the 1930 revolution took revenge against radicals like himself taking away their hard-earned cátedra hours. Gondra 1937.

endemic and epidemic diseases, there were many infectious diseases affecting the health of children that greatly determined very high rates of infant mortality of the 1880s. Originally endemic to the Northwest, Paludic fever rapidly disseminated to the center and littoral provinces. With the inflow of mass immigration and the growth of cities, Tuberculosis spread reaching almost uncontrollable proportions among workers. The same could be said of venereal diseases, such as blenorragia and siphilis, that disseminated easily in the context of a predominantly male immigrant population and the rapid growth of legalized prostitution.⁴⁴ Various infectious diseases affecting infants' respiratory and digestive systems required interventions in the sphere of public hygiene that demanded substantial state investments in potable water, sewage system, milk control, waste disposal, etc. In short, the battle front was complex and diverse.

Secondly, despite the consensus among physicians about the need to improve the health of the population, the technologies to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases were not always available or effective. It proved easier to control the "big killers" (yellow fever, cholera, smallpox, bubonic plague) than to deal with more persistent diseases like paludism and tuberculosis. Third, to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with infectious disease, hygienists coincided, it was not enough to build hospitals and train doctors and nurses; the habits of the population had to be changed. And this required mobilizing and concientizing vast sectors of civil society. In this public health reformers were quite successful: they created model associations across the nation to fight particular diseases such as the Argentine League Against Tuberculosis (1901) and the Argentine League Against Alcoholism (1903).⁴⁵

If one were to judge the collective achievements of the public-health movement with a few representative statistics, one would have to conclude that this expert bureaucracy was partially successful. They managed to reduce both overall and infant mortality, particularly in major cities such as Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Rosario and Mendoza, but not to the degree expected by hygienists. For the Capital city, the infant mortality rate was reduced from 168 per thousand in 1880 to 123 per thousand by 1900, to 94 per

⁴⁴ See Recalde, *La salud de los trabajadores* (1997).

⁴⁵ Both associations mobilized public participation with the establishment of local "ligas populares". See Recalde, *La salud de los trabajadores* (1997), chapters 5 and 6.

thousand by 1914, and to 70 per thousand by 1930. (See Table 4) This was clearly a significant achievement but still about 30 to 40 points higher than contemporary medical technologies allowed. In other cities of Argentina, the progress was slower. This sharp reduction in infant mortality brought about a corresponding reduction in overall mortality and an increase in life expectancy. For the country as a whole, overall mortality dropped from 23 to 12 per thousand during the period 1900-1930. Life expectancy at birth increased from 39 years to 54 years between 1880 and 1930. Though important, these achievements were modest in comparison with the great reduction of illiteracy attained by the *estado docente*, and also in relation to the great power and influence gained by the medical profession.

Later than the educational community, the leaders of the hygienic movement also obtained the needed legislation from the Argentine Congress. Among them, the National Sanitary Law of 1912 (law 7414) which mandated the establishment of “prophylactic centers” in each large city of the country. In addition, the federal government passed laws that facilitated the work of public health reformers: laws about Sunday rest, regulations to the work of women and children, un-expensive housing, and limitations to the sale of alcohol. Yet health policies remained for a long time a municipal concern, and the federal agency created to coordinate public health initiatives, the Departamento Nacional de Higiene (DNH) never gained the power and influence that the CNE had.

A brief review of the achievements and obstacles encountered by public health reformers in the fight against the most important diseases of the early 20th century could give us an idea of both the social power of this expert bureaucracy and the limitations imposed by particular historical and geographical circumstances. While the public health bureaucracy was able to control in three decades the “big killers,” their prolonged struggle against Tuberculosis and Paludism proved disappointing.

a) The Control of “Big Killers”

The origins of the Hygienic Movement have been substantially studied in the last decades.⁴⁶ The outbreak of devastating epidemics (yellow fever in 1871, cholera in

⁴⁶ See Veronelli and Correch, Los orígenes institucionales de la salud pública (2004), Recalde, La salud de los trabajadores en Buenos Aires (1997);

1884 and 1894, small-pox in 1892, and bubonic plague in 1899) gave public visibility and political influence to a group of physicians interested on the question of public health. The control these “big killers” was deemed essential for attracting European immigration. In this context, public health specialists such as E. Wilde, G. Rawson, E. Coni, J. Penna, S. Gache and others started to promote their ideas about social hygiene and transform their suggestions into state policies. The pioneers of the hygienic movement were able to establish the necessity of sanitary police and quarantines in major ports, the medical check-up of immigrants, and the construction in Argentina’s major cities of waste disposal, drainage, and potable water facilities.

Emilio Coni, the father of “sanitation campaigns” in Buenos Aires and other big cities, pointed out the need to purify the water that people drank, the importance of establishing a sanitary police in the ports, and advocated for the dissection of swamps, the control of markets, cemeteries, slaughter-houses and milk distributors, and the early detection and isolation of infested persons. As a result of a multiplicity of municipal interventions, the mortality due to epidemic disease (typhus, smallpox, scarlatine, difteria, etc.) in the Capital city fell from 22 percent to 8 percent of deaths.⁴⁷ With the force of the state, successive vaccination campaigns managed to control smallpox to negligible levels by the mid-1890s. Improvements in the availability of potable water in public establishments and the construction of sewage facilities helped to reduce significantly the incidence of typhoid fever and cholera by the early 1900s. The sanitation service of the city, through improvements in garbage disposal and the killing of rats, was able to control the bubonic plague. Most of these actions, those that involved investments in urban infrastructure as well as those that resulted from the enhancement of the regulatory powers of the state, were limited to the sphere of the city.⁴⁸

b) Tuberculosis.

According to Diego Armus, the campaign against TB between 1890 and 1930 was able to mobilize civic society around a common goal: the control of further infections of TB. Yet, despite four decades of struggles for state funds, despite armies of doctors, nurses,

⁴⁷ A. Alvarez, “Reinado y control de las epidemias” (2004).

⁴⁸ As V. Pita has shown, even within the Capital city, between 1880 and 1900 the medical elite had to contend with the power of the women of the Sociedad de Beneficencia that controlled important hospitals and asylums. Pita, “¿La ciencia o la costura?” (2004).

and functionaries committed to the campaign, the building of specialized facilities, and tons of paper and thousands of talks devoted to educate the public, the rate of mortality due to TB failed to decline as expected. In fact, until the late 1940s, the decline of TB mortality was painfully slow. The discovery of antibiotics during WWII and its rapid adoption in the following period (1945-1965) produced the expected results.⁴⁹

This was a costly disease causing 14 percent of the reported deaths. It attacked mostly the young population (the 20-29 group), disseminating more easily in working-class environments. In the mid 1910s, compared with other European big cities, Buenos Aires presented an alarmingly high rate of TB infectious and mortality.⁵⁰ According to estimates of Dr. Domingo Cabred, 9.5 percent of the people assisted in the hospitals of Capital between 1906 and 1917 were infected with TB. In the country as a whole, the disease caused around 10,000 to 13,000 deaths per year. Due to more rapid urbanization TB mortality was higher in the littoral than in the interior.⁵¹ By the second decade of the century, the disease was not receding. Rather than decline, the mortality due to TB increased from 14.2 to 16.8 per ten thousand during the period 1912 to 1916.⁵²

Leading hygienist Emilio Coni conceded that the Anti-tuberculosis League failed to attract the interest of the national government during its first ten years of activities (1901-11). Minor gains were made in municipal regulations: the use spitting-bowls in public spaces, the prohibition to hospitalize *tuberculosos* in common hospital halls, and the obligatory denunciation of any TB outbreak. With minimal funds, the League was only able to create five *dispensarios* in the capital city.⁵³ The first hospital for TB patients was actually built by the Sociedad de Beneficencia, a philanthropic institutions managed by upper-class ladies.

In a 1917 another leading hygienist, Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro, welcomed the fact that the government had finally decided to study and combat tuberculosis. Ten years later, little

⁴⁹ D. Armus, *La ciudad impura*, 2007, chapter 7.

⁵⁰ The mortality in the Queen of the Plata was greater than that of Hamburg and London, though lower than that of Paris, Budapest, Viena and Berlin. D. Cabred, "La tuberculosis in la República Argentina" (1919), 119-20.

⁵¹ While in the Littoral the mortality rate due to TB was 16.1 per 10,000, in Cuyo it was 13.4 ‰, 13.1 ‰ in the Center region, and 13.3 ‰ in the North. Cabred 1919: 116.

⁵² Cabred 1919: 115-16.

⁵³ Coni, *Memorias*, 1918.

had been achieved. Deaths due to TB were as large in 1924 as in 1916. In 1935 the DNH commissioned and published a statistical study of the disease. The conclusions of the Susini-Paso-Sauchinger Report were quite pessimistic. The mortality due to TB, stagnant since 1930, was still high. While the Littoral cities reached lower rates of mortality in the early 1930s, the northern provinces (Tucumán, Salta and Jujuy) presented the new centers of infection.⁵⁴

The massive propaganda campaign carried out by the Argentine Anti-Tuberculosis League failed to check the disease. It served though, to create public awareness about the risks of the disease and the ways people should act to minimize contagion. The anti-TB campaign contributed to the diffusion of an “hygienic way of life,” consolidating the social power and notoriety of the medical bureaucracy. Since the beginning, doctors characterized TB as a “social disease,” underscoring the fact that underlying social factors such as poverty, malnutrition, inadequate housing and workplaces, alcoholism, and excessive work, facilitated the spread of the disease.

There was no single method to control the disease. Leading figures of the anti-TB campaign recommended a catalogue of policies, including TB dispensaries, farm colonies for weak children, cheaper working-class housing, milk distribution in schools, etc. Since there was not vaccine to cure this disease, doctors tried to recuperate the ill through abundant diet, clean air, and periods of rest in distant sanatoria. Clinics for the treatment of *tuberculosos* were quite expensive and quite into the 1930s it was not clear who should pay for this cost. Unlike the special funding for schools, physicians were unable to produce legislation to earmark certain proportion of taxes to financing the construction of sanatorios de tuberculosos.

Because of all this, the disease continued to claim the lives of young workers well into the Peronist administration. In 1951 the Ministry of Asuntos Técnicos published the findings of a statistician showing some “progress” made in the anti-TB campaign. The rate of mortality had declined from 11.1 to 7.1 per ten thousand between 1935 and 1948. The “progress” was so modest that Peron’s Minister of Health, Ramón Carrillo,

⁵⁴ Recalde, Vida popular y salud.... As late as 1936 Dr Aráoz Alfaro, director of the national anti-TB campaign, lamented that, unlike the progress made in the treatment of other infectious diseases, tuberculosis mortality remained undeterred. (quoted by Armus, 2007, p.293)

had to stretch the truth to affirm that the disease was “in the process of being controlled.”⁵⁵ Apparently, the improvement of workers’ income brought about by Justicialismo did not improve too much workers’ health. US antibiotics had to come to the rescue of failed Peronist public health policies.

b) Paludism.

Paludism was disease endemic to the northern provinces of Argentina. Though detected in the late 19th century, paludism became a public concern only in the early 20th century. It was a debilitating disease that affected a wide area (300,000 square km), where about a million people lived. Starting in the provinces of the northwest, the disease had migrated to Santiago del Estero, Cordoba, and Corrientes by the second decade of the century. Migratory workers and the expansion of railroads facilitated the expansion of the disease.⁵⁶ According to experts, the most efficient way to eradicate the disease was with “land sanitation” works (the drainage of swamps, the leveling of terrain, the consolidation of irrigation canals, building ‘borders’ around shallow rivers), an extremely costly policy. The DNH had invested substantial funds in this sort of activities before 1916, when budgetary cuts forced the federal government to abandon public works. As a result, the disease returned to the same areas.

In addition to “land sanitation,” there was little the DNH could do. When budgets allowed, the DNH could distribute quinine among the infested population and hope that people’s defenses would increase. By the late 1920s Barbieri reported that little progress had been made, except in certain delimited areas targeted by the Rockefeller Foundation for sanitation work (among them was Monteros, in Tucuman province).⁵⁷ Leading hygienists involved in the anti-paludic campaign –Dr Araoz Alfaro was perhaps the most influential—blamed the absence of a centralized sanitary policy for the lack of progress in controlling the enemy. In addition, the provinces duplicated efforts, staffing their own personnel, and not coordinating their activities with the DNH.⁵⁸

In 1935, Dr. Carlos Alvarado, director of the anti-paludic program, concluded that the struggle against the endemic disease had not been successful. He claimed that sanitary

⁵⁵ Tassart 1951.

⁵⁶ Penna and Barbieri 1916.

⁵⁷ Barbieri 1928.

⁵⁸ Veronelli and Correch 2004.

agents had been eradicating the wrong type of mosquito, concentrating mistakenly on the removal of swamps.⁵⁹ He recommended a change in policy; to disseminate aquatic plants, to promote the reforestation of barren lands, to intensify the *policía de focos*. The program required to destroy all mosquito breeding-grounds in the surrounding areas of cities. To do this, the active support of local communities was needed. Mosquito-killing teams had to search *palmo a palmo* the terrain, before they could decide where other brigades will pour petroleum in the area.⁶⁰

Interestingly, Alvarado singled out the lack of adequate personnel (médicos sanitarios) as one of the factors responsible for the failure to control paludism. Land sanitation on a massive scale would demand the mobilization of thousands of people to form “sanitation brigades.” Yet there was little hope in trying to persuade the state to finance the training of sanitarios in medical schools. Local firms did not give sufficient cooperation to the DNH: railroad companies and sugar ingenios failed to do their part in cleaning up possible Anopheles breeding grounds. Railroad companies, most of them state firms, did not help to distribute quinine, did not install mosquito screens on the trains, and rarely filled with petroleum the swamps alongside the rail.⁶¹ Far from the littoral, it was difficult to mobilize the population around a common goal. Federal authorities had to contend with local bosses unwilling to use scarce labor force for “land sanitation” campaigns.

c) Decline in Infant Mortality

In spite of these apparent failures in the control of paludism and tuberculosis, both “social diseases” associated with poverty and unhealthy environments, the basic indicators of public health improved significantly during this period. In particular, the decline of infant mortality in major cities, quite resistant to fall in the period 1890-1900, started to drop significantly in cities such as Buenos Aires, Cordoba, and Rosario in the following decades. This was in part the result of important improvements in urban sanitation, that included sewage, garbage collection, potable water, the control in the transportation and commerce of milk, and regulations that pushed unhealthy tanneries

⁵⁹ Instead of combating the larvae of the *Anopheles pseudopunctipennis*, the regional programs had been searching and destroying *criaderos* of other types of *Anopheles*. The one specie that laboratory studies identified as endemic to the Northern provinces did not reproduce in swamps as previously believed but in the clear waters of irrigation canals and rivers.

⁶⁰ Alvarado 1938.

⁶¹ Barbieri 1928.

and slaughter-houses out of the city boundaries. In addition, it is clear that, due to the efforts of municipal governments and the immigrant associations, the city of Buenos Aires was able to build new hospitals. More importantly was perhaps the effort to disseminate sanitary information among the urban population. Sanitary campaigns tended to make school children and adults aware of the risks posed by diseases.

As a result of this combination of factors, infant mortality rates started to drop in the major cities early in the 20 th century. In the interior provinces, however, IMR remained alarmingly high until the 1940s and 1950s. The decline in infant mortality reflected the success of public health reformers in disseminating hygienic habits among the population. In addition, reformers' mobilization of social power (civil-society associations) in support to the cause of public health pushed a reluctant federal state to finance investments in social infrastructure (hospitals, waste disposal, current water, etc.) that improved urban residents' health.

EMPLEOMANIA IN THE RADICAL REPUBLIC

The conservative and radical governments left the country an important legacy in terms of elementary education. The School Census of 1932 revealed that 67.7 percent of children of ages 6 to 14 were attending school.⁶² Yet the successful expansion of schooling created opportunities for empleomanía. The dramatic expansion in the number of schools was accompanied with a corresponding increase in the number of teachers. From 1880 to 1930, the number of teachers increased from 2,185 to 38,247, an increase of 17.5 times in five decades. Was the increase in employment disproportionate to the task of disseminating common education? To a certain extent it was, considering that during the same five decades the number of schools increased only 6.1 times and the number of students multiplied by 13. (See Table 3) One could argue that larger school buildings and lower student-teacher ratios is a good thing, but it is difficult to deny that the increasing availability of teaching jobs created an important political asset for politicians. How important was this political asset? Between 1910 and 1930, there was an average of 1,150 appointments per year, certainly not a negligible figure

⁶² Military and enrollment records showed that those enrolled between 1928 and 1932 (18-19 year olds) showed a rate of illiteracy of 21 percent for the nation and only 3.4 percent for the capital city.

(particularly if one compares this figure with the 434 new appointments per year of the 1880-1910 period).

In the area of education the transition from the Conservative (1880-1915) to the Radical republic (1916-1930) meant a change in emphasis from elementary to secondary school. The budgets and personnel of normal schools, national colegios, and special schools (arts, technical and commerce) tended to increase at the expense of the resources allocated to primary education. Juan C. Tedesco, a historian of education, has argued that this was the result of the ascent of middle-class sectors into government positions. Middle-class pressed public functionaries for the creation of secondary schools in their cities. Every city wanted to have such schools. Having a high-school degree became crucial to attaining state employment. High-school professors acquired public notoriety and esteem. Graduates from *profesorados* and “normal schools” demanded jobs in these new establishments, using many times their social, family and political connections to obtain them. Thus, sons of middle-class families who were unable to enter the clergy, become a lawyer, or acquire land, sought for a position in secondary schools. (Tedesco 1986: 170-214)

Being a secondary school professor provided greater income and higher social status than being a primary school teacher. As a result, the latter occupation came to be dominated by women while the former became a male preserve. In addition to higher salaries, secondary school professor were able to accumulate *cátedras* in various establishments. Some of them combined jobs in secondary schools with positions in government, business, or the exercise of liberal professions. Lawyers and physicians who failed to attain a university professorship could easily get appointments in a prestigious colegio nacional.⁶³

The Conservative Republic suffered from a chronic shortage of certified teachers. Fourteen normal schools for teachers were created between 1870 and 1885. Before 1885 these schools formed less than 100 teachers a year and from 200 to 300 teachers a year in the latter half of the 1880s.⁶⁴ This number was quite insufficient for the growing

⁶³ Physicians were appointed in courses related to public hygiene, anatomy, and biology; lawyers in courses related to “civic instruction”, constitutional law, and history.

⁶⁴ A. Alliaud, Los maestros y su historia (2007) p.104 and Table 2 p.122.

demands of schools. Due to this, during the 1880s and 1890s, the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* had to accept the reality of non-graduate teachers in front of the classrooms. Between 1890 and 1900 24 new normal schools were established, raising to 38 the total number of these establishments (Tedesco 1986). In the interior provinces and in rural areas, the lack of *maestros diplomados* was more severe, due to the concentration of graduate teachers in the Capital and other major cities.⁶⁵

Complaints about the shortage of certified teachers continued until the mid-1910s. Juan B. Justo considered that the 900 teachers that graduated each year were quite insufficient for the needs of a growing school system. To remedy this situation, he recommended that the CNE continued hiring non-graduate teachers, lowering the age of entry of new teachers.⁶⁶ In the decades that followed, this situation was reversed as governments increased the funds allocated to secondary education and appointed a large number of directors of high schools and colleges. These positions went mostly to men. Women, finding avenues leading to middle-class status closed, opted massively for joining the magisterio.⁶⁷ Thus, by the early 1930s there was a surplus of qualified teachers, most of them women, engrossing the waiting list of the CNE.

Contemporary critics attributed this reversal of fortune to the practice of empleomanía. Nepotism, political favoritism, and the pressing needs of an emerging urban middle-class created an insatiable demand for jobs in secondary education. The “hypertrophic growth” of secondary education budgets, according to Juan B. Justo, led to the consequent disregard of elementary schooling and to the decline of the old merit system:

“Se debe también a esos mismos motivos el desarrollo hipertrófico que ha tomado el presupuesto argentino de educación secundaria y educación especial. Viste muy bien eso de ser profesor de colegio nacional o de escuela normal, mientras que la de maestro de escuela es una situación muy humilde. Y ningún señor de importancia se atreve a ofrecer a su protegido un puesto de maestro de

⁶⁵ Since the beginning, the formation of teachers was quite unequal among the provinces. In 1892, for instance, 432 teachers graduated from normal schools in the Capital, 100 in Mendoza, 137 in Tucuman, but only 30 in Salta, 20 in Jujuy, and 28 in La Rioja. (Alliaud 2007, Table 3, p.124)

⁶⁶ J. B. Justo, Educación Pública (1930), pp. 75-76.

⁶⁷ Alliaud suggests that since the 1890s the normal schools were intended for women, that they were called “escuelas normales de maestras.” Yet the feminization of the teachers’ profession was more a phenomenon of the early 20th century. See....

escuela; de modo que a las aptitudes más corrientes, más vulgares, tocan los cargos menos penosos en todo sentido, los de más alta jerarquía. Y así vemos multiplicarse en exceso estos establecimientos, en un país donde faltan escuelas primarias para seiscientos mil niños. Y los vemos multiplicarse hasta en localidades donde no pueden encontrar suficiente número de alumnos y donde son también inútiles por la incapacidad del personal nombrado para servirlos.”⁶⁸

In order to educate the common citizen, the government and the political class created a growing income gap between the *profesor de colegio* and the *maestra de escuela*. This intensified the gender gap, for women constituted the vast majority of common school teachers, while men figured prominently among the professors and directors of high schools. Justo made the CNE responsible for this situation. For the sake of education for all, the National Council of Education had created an enormous corps of school inspectors, many of them, unnecessary. While the Lainez Law required one inspector per province, the CNE had appointed hundreds of them. To finance the expansion of positions in secondary schools and the corps of schools inspectors, the CNE reduced the salaries of common school teachers.⁶⁹

To Justo, this was dark side of educational policies in a class-based society. Common school teachers were people of modest means, who lacked political patrons to defend their salaries. Having budget positions, the CNE postponed without reason the designation of common teachers. Conversely, politicians created and distributed positions in secondary and university education with suspicious celerity.⁷⁰ These superfluous employments were tailor-made for sons of the middle and upper classes. These positions paid high salaries, even in comparison with advanced industrial nations. A rector of an Argentine national college earned more than 16,000 marks a year, while professors of the gymnasium in Prussia earned no more than 9.600 marks a year.⁷¹ Secondary education resulted extraordinary expensive by contemporary international standards.

⁶⁸ Justo, *La Obra Parlamentaria* (1913), p.147.

⁶⁹ Justo, *Educación Pública* (1930), pp.100 and 106-07.

⁷⁰ Justo wrote: “...We see the proliferation (*pululación* in the original), absolutely absurd, of posts in secondary and university learning, posts that are more difficult to fill in the proper fashion, but are created to satisfy [the request] of particular persons.” (Justo 1930: 145)

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

In later interventions in Congress, in the period 1916-1919, Justo continued his attacks on the over-staffing and over-payment that characterized most secondary education, extending his criticism to universities, institutions overfilled with *cátedras* in all kinds of specialties. Having at the beginning supported the University Reform (1918), Justo later lamented the true accomplishment of this middle-class revolution: an enormous increase in salaries of professor and the equally large multiplication in the number of useless *cátedras*. After the *Reforma*, the middle-class had elevated itself to positions of authority within the university, only to distribute among themselves administrative positions and additional *prevendas* of all sorts.⁷²

Coming from a different ideological trench, Benjamín Villafañe agreed with this criticism raised by Justo. To the charges of political favoritism, parasitic bureaucracies, and nepotism, he added the question of the low-class origins (and questionable ethics) of public functionaries during the Radical administrations. According to Villafañe, politically-appointed school directors and professors did not perform their jobs, devoting most of their time to political work.

“En los colegios y escuelas acontecía algo aún peor. Atorrantes de la peor estirpe moral, sin inteligencia ni instrucción, fueron agraciados con la dirección de estos establecimientos en premio de trabajos electorales. Lo mismo acontecía con las cátedras. Los maestros amigos, tenían los unos cátedras en Buenos Aires y pueblos cercanos, pero vivían en el interior, haciendo política y cobrando los sueldos como si los desempeñaran. Otros vivían en Buenos Aires y cobraban cátedras que debían dictar más lejos. Lo mismo aconteció en todo el país.”⁷³

In 1920, Minister of Education Angel Gallardo formed a comisión to investigate the accusations launched by deputy Augusto Bunge. Among the many criticisms (from misallocation of funds to the existence of non-authorized agencies within the CNE), Bunge affirmed that most of the school inspectors appointed in the Capital had gone to men already holding two to three positions, specially *cátedras* in secondary schools. In addition, Bunge claimed that Lainez schools in the provinces had been created on the request of influential people, not on the basis of real need. Bunge alleged that the

⁷² This was particularly true at the University of Cordoba, the center of the movement, where nepotism and political favoritism reigned supreme, as before the Reform. (Justo, *Educación Pública*: 145-46)

⁷³ Villafañe, *Degenerados* (1928), p. 79.

National School Inspection was a “focus of corruption,” accusing employees of the CNE of various forms of fraude.⁷⁴ While the commission rebutted most of Bunge’s accusations, it acknowledged the practice of double employment for school inspectors.

Did the quality of elementary education decline as a result of the populist politics of the Radical administrations? Did political favoritism erode teachers’ missionary spirit, the attribute that had made the campaign against illiteracy an unqualified success before 1916? We must recall that Justo’s criticism applied both to the last administration of the Conservative Republic and to the first Yrigoyen administration. Villafañe’s attacks concentrated mostly the Radical administrations. It is difficult to assert how extensive were the practices denounced by Villafañe and Justo and the influence this had on the march of popular literacy. Recent historiography about the Radical administrations, even those written by partisan radicals, tends to confirm these views.

One of the points of consensus is the use of public employment as a political weapon. When Yrigoyen assumed the second presidency in 1928, he laid-off 10,000 public employees for alleged sympathy with the anti-personalist Alvear. Between November 1928 and April 1929, the *Liga Nacional de Empleados Civiles* mobilized to get these employees re-incorporated, with the support in Congress of socialist deputy De Tomaso.⁷⁵ In March 1924, during the Alvear administration, the socialists interpellated minister Matienzo about the question of the political distribution of public employment. The minister responded that, since there was no legislation about the career of civil service, politicians could discretionally appoint the employees. A year before President Alvear had issued a decree prohibiting public employees from making political propaganda during their work-time. This practice was apparently current in colleges, schools, the postal service and the central administration.⁷⁶ Historian A.V. Persello concludes: “En el interior del partido gobernante, el reparto de los empleos funcionó como fuente de lealtades, pero también de disparador de conflictos y tensiones, lo cual generó una extrema faccionalización.” (Ibid., p.75)

⁷⁴ Consejo Nacional de Educación, Cargos formulados contra el Consejo Nacional de Educación. Buenos Aires: C.N.E., 1921.

⁷⁵ Persello, El Partido Radical (2004), p. 74.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 73.

To historian David Rock, the last two years of the Yrigoyen administration consolidated the practice of empleomanía. Between 1921 and 1922 the government created only in the Capital from 10,000 to 20,000 new jobs, as a means to temper the anxieties created by the world depression on the middle sectors.⁷⁷ Public employment was used to solidify the connection between the government and local party comités and, through this means, to reach a larger political clientele.⁷⁸ Thus, when Alvear took office in 1922, he tried to make economies in the federal budget by dismissing public employees. Alvear fiscal orthodoxy cost him dearly in terms of political clientele, for with a slowly growing bureaucracy, it was difficult to maintain political support. The Yrigoyenistas began to take advantage of this weakness gaining support among public employees. In 1929, when Yrigoyen returned to the presidency, public employment was one of his forms of revenge. He purged the public administration of Alvear sympathizers. *La Vanguardia*, the socialist periodical, claimed that he fired 3,000 teachers employed by the CNE.⁷⁹ The socialists went to the extreme of accusing the new administration of “selling to the best bet” public positions.

Ironically, the appointing party supporters to positions for which they were not qualified was an accusation raised by Radicales against the conservative regime in the early years of the century. For instance, in 1905 the Radical party accused the government of Dr. Quintana of filling the most important positions in colleges, courts, institutes, and other government agencies with conservative *cortesanos*.⁸⁰ And the political use of public appointments and lay-offs seemed to have continued after the fall of Yrigoyen. Luis Roque Gondra, a radical, complained bitterly that the revolution of 1930 used accusations of *incompatibilidades*, alleged accumulation of public jobs in colleges and schools, to persecute the supporters of the deposed regime.⁸¹

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

⁷⁷ Rock, El radicalismo argentino (2001), p. 121. As a leading member of the Radical party acknowledged: “...ha surgido entre muchos correligionarios una verdadera preocupación, que es contagiosa, de ocupar puestos públicos en la administración nacional, provincial y municipal.” Ibid., p.227.

⁷⁸ Rock wrote: “Los cargos se usaban para mantener el nexo entre el gobierno y los comités del partido, lo que a su vez movilizaban al electorado.” Ibid., p. 121.

⁷⁹ Rock, El partido radical (2001), p. 244.

⁸⁰ Giacabone and Gallo, Radicalismo Bonaerense (1999), p. 154.

⁸¹ Gondra, El radicalismo y la política del momento (1937), pp.61-71.

Two leading professional elites of the Age of Progress, physicians and educators, were able to gather public support and state funding promote the dissemination of two basic public goods: elementary education and public health. While they found many obstacles in the way, their efforts elevated the standard of living of the population, reducing the rates of illiteracy and infant and overall mortality. In retrospect, public health experts encountered greater obstacles than educators. They had to fight diseases not completely known by science; they had no one but various targets (different diseases to control); and though they did their best to mobilize public support for the cause of public hygiene, they could not build a single “teaching machine” for the control of disease. As the case of campaign against TB illustrates, there were always multiple objectives to be achieved with the same budget. Hence, no matter how strong the public consensus was, the dispersion of efforts was inevitable.

We have examined the campaigns to reduce the incidence of two important diseases: tuberculosis and paludism. Achievements were in these two areas very poor. First, the funds the state allocated to fighting disease were notably inferior than to those devoted to elementary education. (See Table 3). With great effort, public health experts were able to persuade the government and the public about the importance of tuberculosis. Yet, they failed to attain a specific and permanent fund for the anti-paludic or the anti-TB campaigns, similar to that created for the CNE. Civic-society associations contributed as much as the state in the funding of hospital, clinics, and sanatoria. Unlike the case of common schools, the federal state did not take up the responsibility of training a growing army of sanitaristas.

Secondly, the efforts to improve public health conditions proved more difficult in the interior provinces than in the capital or the Littoral provinces. Hygienists could not bypass so easily, as educators managed to do, the institutional problems created by the federal organization of the republic. The Departamento Nacional de Higiene never acquired the authority over the whole national territory to impose uniform rules and policies, as the Consejo Nacional de Educación managed to do. Third, while the instruments and remedies proposed by public health experts were many, their effectiveness was always in doubt (from *hospitales de tuberculosos* to quinine treatment, from mosquito-killing teams to *petrolización*, from prenupcial medical check-ups to inspection of *burdellos*, etc.). To a certain extent, this expert community

did not have a single proven “technology” to combat disease. Educators instead, possessed well-proven methods to teach basic literary and math skills to the illiterate.

Finally, the budgets allocated to public health—smaller and also dispersed into multiple tasks and institutions--were more sensitive to economic cycles than those allocated to elementary education. The shortage of public funds, due most to downturns in the export sector, translated into the abandonment of crucial public works for the improvement of public health. The abandonment of “land sanitation” works during the post WWI period is a case in point.⁸² In the case of common education, instead, crises were felt by teachers in the form of unpaid wages, rarely in the stoppage of school construction.

Pursuing the goal of “education for all” policy makers favored the consolidation of a growing bureaucracy of school inspectors and professors of secondary education. These public employments were distributed, not on the bases of by merit but according to clientelistic politics. In addition, many elementary school positions came under the control of party bosses. Unfortunately, we know much less about the incidence of empleomanía in the provision of public health. The campaign against paludism required a large number of laborers to man the “sanitation campaigns.” Many of these laborers were unpaid, others were hired on a temporary basis. This was unskilled labor that was considered a burden more than a favor. Consequently, politicians had little to gain distributing *sanitarista* jobs. The anti-TB campaign must have required the creation of more state jobs, particularly nurses, doctors, and hospital staff. Yet to the extent that doctors controlled these appointments, politicians had probably had fewer opportunities to appoint partisans, relatives and friends in these posts.

The success of Argentine education experts in reducing substantially illiteracy rates shows the commitment of politicians to this common, crucial objective. Yet, the multiplication of secondary schools and the growth of educational bureaucracies indicate that these notable efforts consolidated one of the most objectionable features of *política criolla*: the use of public employment as political reward. The democratization of political life after the electoral reform of 1912 worsened this tendency. For the leadership of the Radical Republic resorted more frequently and more extensively to

⁸² This hypothesis needs to be confirmed with additional data.

empleomanía. One could argue that the distribution of employments among middle-class sectors was a “natural” outcome of the extension of the franchise. In the United States and in some European countries, the democratization of political life engendered a quite different outcome. Movements led by professional or expert elites, such as the US Progressives, pressed for meritocracy in the civil service. Not so in Argentina. Argentine expert elites strove for the implementation of needed social reforms geared to the provision of public goods, but they never invested the time or the energy needed to reform the state apparatus itself. Whether controlled by Conservatives or by Radicales, politicians dominated the distribution of public employments, allowing no reform of the civil service that could put in jeopardy this powerful political machine.

There was a crucial difference in the institutional design for common education and for public health. The provision of education was at the beginning the endeavor of a central institution, the CNE, controlled at the local level by “school councils.” Over time, the influence of school councils dwindled to the point in which the federal state administration (the CNE) came to dominate educational policies. In the provision of public health instead, civic-society associations dominated at first. Only in a second stage the federal state step in and became a dominant figure, but many institutions at different levels continued to provide basic health care. Overall, one could argue that the funding and the commitment invested in public health campaigns were much less systematic than that invested in common education. The DNH had during most of the first period (1880-1915) much less state funding than the CNE. In fact, it was during the República Radical (1916-1930), when *empleomanía* became widespread, that the influence of public health experts was finally heard by national and provincial governments.

Buenos Aires, September 2009, reviewed August 2010.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Progress in Elementary Educacion

Year	schooling rate	illiteracy rate
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(recruits)

1880	28,5	44,7
1900	48,6	31,5
1914	55,6	27,3
1930	68,5	16,3

Sources:

Consejo Nacional de Educación, Informe presentado al Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, año 1936.
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Table 2: Illiteracy Rates according to National Censuses

(population 24 and older that never attended school)

Census	% Illiteracy Argentina	Literacy Argentina	Literacy Bue As prov	Literacy Capital
1869	77,4	22,6	28,5	51,7
1895	53,3	46,7	55	70,2
1914	35,9	64,1	68,4	78,8
1946	16,6	83,4	90,2	94,3

Source:

Consejo Nacional de Educación, "El analfabetismo en la Argentina" (1963).

Table 3: Schools, Teachers and Students

(all elementary schools in Argentina)

Year	# of schools	# of teachers	# of students
1880	1555	2185	82161
1890	2596	5682	191399
1900	3820	8597	352208
1910	5977	15233	547858
1920	7871	25164	832840
1930	9552	38247	1068880

Source:

Consejo Nacional de Educación, "Cincuentenario de la Ley 1420" (1938), tomo II, pp.235-237.

Table 4: Progress in Public Health

Year	Life expectancy (Capital)	Infant mortality (Capital)	Infant mortality (Argentina)	Overall mortality (Argentina)
1880	39	168	?	

1900	40	124	?	23
1914	48	94	122	15
1930	54	70	106	12

Sources:

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Table 5: Federal Expenditures in Education and Health
(in percentage of total state expenditures)

	Public Instruction	Department of Hygiene
1902	6,35	0,42
1905	7,92	0,41
1910	10,51	0,61
1923	12,16	0,75
1935	15,19	0,65

Sources:

Memorias del Ministerio de Hacienda de la Nación, años 1902-1905-1910.

Leyes de Presupuesto Nacional, años 1923 y 1935.

Table 6: Epidemics in Buenos Aires city

Year	Epidemic	# of victims
1880	difteria	335
	viruela	832
1883	viruela	1510
1884	sarampión	194
1886	difteria y crup	452
	cólera	562
1887	cólera	530
	difteria y crup	1052
	sarampión	141
	viruela	1299
1888	difteria y crup	1385
	fiebre tifoidea	388
1889	difteria y crup	905
	fiebre tifoidea	509
	sarampión	261
1890	difteria y crup	1037
	fiebre tifoidea	628
	viruela	21948
1891	difteria y crup	623
	fiebre tifoidea	401
1892	difteria y crup	609

1893	difteria y crup	658
	sarampión	812
1894	difteria y crup	445
1895	escarlatina	598
	sarampión	812
	fiebre amarilla*	10
1900	escarlatina	359
1901	escarlatina	409
	viruela	1227
1906	viruela	970
1910	viruela	543
1915	difteria y crup	402
	sarampión	353

Sources:

V. Mazzeo: "Mortalidad Infantil en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1856 - 1986)", Buenos Aires, 1993, pág. 21-22.

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