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# Latin America. Actors.

Facundo Bey.

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# STUDENT PROTESTS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Annotated sources (1918-2018)

Barbara Potthast, Katharina Schembs (eds.)





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# CONTENTS

<b>I</b>	<b>Introduction</b> <i>Barbara Potthast and Katharina Schembs</i>	<b>7</b>
<b>II</b>	<b>West Berlin, Paris, Mexico City. How Global was the Protest Movement of 1967/68?</b> <i>Anibert Reimann</i>	<b>13</b>
<b>III</b>	<b>The University Reform and the Student Movements in Latin America</b> <i>Valeria Manzano</i>	<b>23</b>
<b>IV</b>	<b>Africa's 1968: Protests and Uprisings across the Continent</b> <i>Heike Becker and David Seddon</i>	<b>31</b>
<b>V</b>	<b>South African student protests 1968 to 2016</b> <i>Heike Becker</i>	<b>43</b>
<b>VI</b>	<b>Sources</b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b>Actors</b>	<b>56</b>
	1.1 Europe	56
	1.2 Latin America	70
	1.3 South Asia	77
	1.4 Africa	78
<b>2.</b>	<b>Academic Goals</b>	<b>88</b>
	2.1 Europe	88
	2.2 Latin America	92

2.3 South Asia	104
2.4 Africa	106
<b>3. Sociopolitical goals</b>	<b>112</b>
3.1 Europe	112
3.2 Latin America	115
3.3 South Asia	119
3.4 Africa	124
<b>4. Protest Forms</b>	<b>134</b>
4.1 Latin America	134
4.2 South Asia	146
4.3 Africa	150
<b>Appendix</b>	
Timeline	154
Chronology of events by region	156
Latin America	156
South Asia	158
Africa	159
Authors	162

## 1.2 LATIN AMERICA

### Deodoro Roca (Argentina 1890-1942)

Facundo Bey

Córdoba, the first Argentine university, founded in 1613 by the Jesuits, is where the Argentine *University Reform* began in 1918 and Deodoro Roca (1890-1942), lawyer, experienced student leader and heretical reader of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Lev Trotsky (1879-1940), was its driving force (Pittelli, Herme: 2010, 150). Although the 1918 Reform was a student Reform, before the first acts of repression by the police and the army, the students had found the support of the workers in the streets. In general terms, the outbreak was philosophically and politically characterized by vehement anti-clerical secularism that was in turn accompanied by a humanist and democratic creed that was equally opposed to feudal aristocratism, the conservatism of the political elites, Darwinian-biological positivism, petty bourgeois conformism, the bureaucratization of the university as a "factory of diplomas" and the mercantilist culture of capitalism. The professional model of the university was also questioned, which was perceived by Roca as a mutilation of man. Many of these claims were later adopted by and adapted to the different reformist movements in both Argentina and the rest of Latin America. The main constellation of philosophers that went on to influence the "diagnosis" of the era and the metaphysical program of Córdoba's reformists were (apart from those already mentioned above) William James (1842-1910), Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), Paul Natorp (1854-1924), Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), and Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Saúl Taborda (1885-1944) was another one of the great protagonists of the Reform in Córdoba and a pedagogue who was greatly influenced by Rickert, Natorp, Georg Simmel (1858-1918), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), and Georg Kerschensteiner (1854-1932), who was a fellow protagonist of the Reform



Source: Roca, Deodoro. *El difícil tiempo nuevo*. Buenos Aires 1956.

in Córdoba. Taborda travelled to La Plata in 1920 to assume the Rectorate of the National School, which was a part of the National University of La Plata. He left his mark there by initiating several educational reforms with the intention of extending the reformist principles, which at the time were required for higher education, to secondary education. Among other measures, he closed the boarding school and introduced the so-called Student House, where the artistic avant-garde, teachers and students could interact, substituting the Anglo-Saxon paradigm with a "spiritual home of open doors" more in line with the tradition of Spanish universities (Taborda 1921: 126). In addition, the Student House had other important functions: it served as the headquarters of University Federation of Students (FLIA, *Federación Universitaria Argentina*), as a university museum to preserve the historical memory of the Reform, and as a meeting place to approach and join the labor movement. His direction of the school was oriented by the attraction to aesthetic education, the replacement of some

professors with those who were affiliated with the University Reform Movement and the pursuit of student participation in institutional matters of all kinds. The Rectorate of the National University of La Plata quickly voiced its resistance to these proposals and began a campaign of attacks against the pedagogue and his supporters. What followed was the closure of the National School, judicial and police intervention and, finally, the expulsion of Taborda in 1921.

## Alejandro Korn (Argentina 1860-1936)

Facundo Bey

The National University of La Plata, founded in 1905, was a modern university in comparison to that of Córdoba by 1918. In fact, it had provided the model that the national government tried to implement in Córdoba in the first stage of the Reform process, a model that was later rejected by the victorious students. Joaquín V. González (1863-1923), its founder and first rector, organized the government of the University of La Plata through the permanent renewal of the members of the High Council and the Academic Council. This context would help set a different course for the Reform in La Plata. First of all, La Plata had a more scientific than professional model, the latter identified with the University of Buenos Aires. González' vision of the university was that of an integral formation, including ethical values and principles. The ultimate aim was to foster the humanistic spirit in the university in order to overcome the fragmentation of higher education, whose harmful effects led to technification, which had disintegrating effects on social life and the personality of man. However, González and his successor, Rodolfo Rivarola (1857-1942), were reluctant to allow students to intervene in the election of university authorities or set up a regime of free attendance to theoretical classes. Although the university extension

(university outreach programs) was already a reality, for example, many reformists considered it to be like crumbs thrown at the poor, instead of constituting two reciprocal and dynamic movements: a university movement for the proletarian and another of the proletarian supporting student causes. Such a cultural atmosphere in La Plata allowed for the genesis of an even more radicalized critical consciousness. Although González had hoped that the progress of the nation would have come under the guidance of science before the eyes of the reformist generation, the official discourse was nothing more than an empty and formal rhetoric, empty words disconnected from the real social issues.

Lastly, in La Plata, although the main claims of the student movement were the same as in Córdoba, the intellectual and philosophical debates were very diverse. Unlike in Córdoba, where the Reformist movement was basically anti-scholastic, in La Plata, where clericalism was nearly non-existent, Reformism developed as a reaction to nineteenth-century positivism. This anti-positivist reaction was led by Alejandro Korn (1860-1936), a professor and Bergsonian philosopher, who was a fundamental reference for the student movement although he was 60 years old at the time. In fact, he was the first university representative in Latin America to be elected officially by students. The



Platense anti-positivism implied a return to the study of the humanities, philosophy and the arts. The other leader of the Platense Reform was the socialist Julio V. González (1899-1955), son of the ex-rector. In 1918, he participated in Córdoba as a representative of the *University Federation of Students of La Plata* (FULP, *Federación Universitaria de La Plata*). He was secretary of the first National Congress of Students that established the doctrinal bases of the Reform.



Source: Archivo General de la Nación Argentina.

## Carlos Cossio (Argentina 1903-1987)

*Facundo Bey*

**T**he *University of Buenos Aires'* scenario was much more similar to that of La Plata than to that of Córdoba. Inspired by La Plata's early reforms, between 1906 and 1908, Buenos Aires adopted a regime of elective government without student participation. In those years, the first student centers and the *University Federation of Students* were founded. In philosophical terms, positivism was the dominant philosophical current and one of its main proponents was the socialist José Ingenieros (1877-1925), an outstanding interpreter of August Comte (1798-1857) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).

Carlos Cossio (1903-1987), later a relevant jurist and phenomenologist of law, wrote his doctoral thesis on "The University Reform or the Problem of the New Generation", published in 1927. In his text he clearly synthesized the question that ignited the Reform, which was informed by different stages of the theoretically and historically available answers: what would the faculty teach that it doesn't already in order to develop culture instead of merely techniques? Cossio understood that there were different answers to this question and different positions that had been represented throughout the Reform process, which served as rehearsal stages during the

development of the moral idea that regulated the new social function of the university. He referred to the protagonists' continuous questioning of the social role of the process by calling it "the history of the theoretical conscience of the Reform regarding the limits of its social function" (1930: 22). Taking Ingenieros as his starting point, Cossio would make an important distinction between the exclaustation of culture, that is to say, the propagation of teaching to the popular social classes, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the socialization of the culture, namely, its fruition "by the content of the teaching itself", oriented towards society and humanity, that is, "to the permanent problems of the community, eager to capture the eternal concerns of humanity, of which all society takes part" (1930: 14). In this sense, for Cossio philosophical education appears to be "a concrete solution that, in the light of contemporary thought, dislodges other possible developments of the cultural approach -such as scientism and classicism or humanism in the historical sense" (1930: 22), considering that "being philosophy the reflection on the totality of the human culture, it finds in itself the whole cultural content [...], adding a synthetic valuation of the culture in which philosophy comes in last place, within any educational system, regarding the disciplines that instruct the partial elements of that culture" (1930: 22). For Cossio, the *University Reform* set up what he called "the integral culture", that is to say the awakening of the ethical and aesthetic sensibility, the meeting of man outside the cloister, with life as an ideal factor. Through a Kantian reading of Reform, Cossio understood that all ethics and aesthetics had to be idealistic in the face of the instrumentalism of scientific, economic, and political positivism and, therefore, it was necessary to found not only the university anew, but also the entire nation on the basis of idealism.



Source: Periódico La Gaceta de Tucumán, archivo, 1949.

# 1918's Reform Figures' Movement among the three major Universities in Argentina in the 20th century

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