



The contributions of Maurício Tragtenberg: the delinquency of education in Brazil¹

Contribuições de Maurício Tragtenberg: a delinquência da educação no Brasil

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Abstract: This article presents the way Maurício Tragtenberg approached the relationship between *power* and the *production of knowledge*. His ideas give support to the concept of *academy delinquency*, which demonstrates the disconnect between *means* and *ends* within education. In other words, it is a historical reality in which all teach, and the production of knowledge does not question the *for what* of their activities. Consequently, they reproduce the unequal power relationships and does not consider the concrete necessities of subordinate classes in unequal and combined capitalism development. The strategies to confront these conditions are discussed from a class struggle perspective. The texts about education, written by the author during the transition to the “New Republic”, and especially the ones produced for the educational journal *Educação & Sociedade*, are the main sources. Accordingly, Tragtenberg’s ideas, the reality of his thoughts, are discussed to inspire the analysis of contemporary educational problems.

Keywords: Maurício Tragtenberg. Academy Delinquency. Power. Brazilian Education.

Resumo: Apresenta-se a maneira como Maurício Tragtenberg abordava as relações entre poder e a produção de conhecimento, que fundamentam a *delinquência acadêmica* expressa na desconexão entre meios e fins na educação. Ou seja, trata-se de uma realidade histórica em que todo ensino e toda produção de conhecimentos não questionam o *para quê* de suas atividades. Logo, reproduzem as relações desiguais de poder e desconsideram as necessidades concretas das classes subalternas num desenvolvimento capitalista desigual e combinado. São também abordadas as estratégias de enfrentamento dessas condições, numa perspectiva atrelada à luta de classes. As fontes utilizadas são os textos sobre educação publicados pelo autor na transição para a Nova República, com enfoque em sua atuação num periódico educacional engajado nas lutas da época: a revista *Educação & Sociedade*. A partir das ideias de Tragtenberg, discute-se a atualidade de seu pensamento para inspirar análises sobre os problemas educacionais contemporâneos.

Palavras-chave: Maurício Tragtenberg. Delinquência Acadêmica. Poder. Educação brasileira.

Submitted on: 31/8/2021. Accepted on: 15/3/2022.

¹ This text results from the research “Projetos editoriais e o debate educacional nos primórdios da “Nova República” (1978-1995): a revista *Educação & Sociedade* e a *Revista da ANDE*”, financed by Fapesp, process 2019/03702.

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“O Brasil tem um enorme passado pela frente”
(MILLÔR..., 2018)

“Eu vejo o futuro repetir o passado
Eu vejo um museu de grandes novidades”
(CAZUZA, 1988)

Introduction

In a classic of the historiographical debate, Marc Bloch (2001) states that history is formed of changes and permanences. History does not repeat, but there are moments where the permanences overlap; and then, as in the cartoonist’s phrase or in the poet’s music, the past is replaced, and the future appears as a museum of novelties.

In Brazil, brutal cuts in resources for research are producing an educational blackout. In March 2021, the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovations (MCTI) suffered the largest cut in the federal budget, with a reduction of 29% compared to 2019, closely followed by the Ministry of Education (MEC), with a reduction of 27.1%. The production of knowledge and the future of science have been seriously compromised. In a document sent by the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science to Congress, there was a warning that, if resources were not reinstated, the national institutions for science and technology would have their activities greatly reduced or even paralysed (ESCOBAR, 2021).

Although these changes are disruptive and have brought a new set of working conditions for education and for the production of science, it is worth noting the historical repetition of the precarious circumstances for the development of intellectual thought and scientific output. Inspired by the thoughts of Maurício Tragtenberg, what is being repeated in the current debacle concerns the conditions and purposes of research and teaching at its different levels in Brazil.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, schools and universities in Brazil were organised under the shadow of selectivity, hierarchy and exclusion, a situation that even persisted during the best periods of GDP growth at the height of the industrialisation process during the entrepreneurial military dictatorship in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The precariousness of education and the production of knowledge was consistently denounced by critical intellectuals, especially at the end of the 1970s. The magical solutions that should have arisen from technological and technical development proved to be resounding failures (CUNHA, 1981; FREITAG, 1984; TRAGTENBERG, 2012a).

In this context of criticism of the educational policy under the dictatorship, Maurício Tragtenberg, an intellectual marked out by his autonomy of thought and originality, stood out in educational debates. His works continue to bring significant contributions that inspire analyses of the current situation, particularly because many of the topics addressed and the questions developed by him continued in subsequent decades and worsened in the social and health crisis from 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of his articles, testimonies, and debates on the educational theme, were concentrated between the second half of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s (UHLE, 2001).

Based on the author’s main works, this article presents the way in which Maurício Tragtenberg approached the relations between power and the production of knowledge that underlie what

he called *academic delinquency*. Delinquency essentially arises from a disconnect between *means* and *ends* in education. In other words, it is a historical reality in which all teaching and all production of knowledge do not radically question the *why* of their activities. They, therefore, reproduce unequal power relations and disregard the concrete needs of the subaltern classes in a scenario of unequal and combined capitalist development. Throughout the text, strategies to confront these conditions are also addressed, from a class struggle perspective.

In addition to his work *Bureaucracy and Ideology*, texts on education published by the author during the period of crisis of the dictatorship and the transition to the New Republic, between 1976 and 1985, are especially used as sources, with a focus on his output in an educational periodical associated with the defence of public schools at the time: the magazine *Educação & Sociedade*, produced by the Centro de Estudos Educação e Sociedade (CEDES), in which the author also participated. Created in 1978, Tragtenberg put together the editorship and was the most frequent author in the first decade of the journal, with 11 published texts².

Maurício Tragtenberg was, at the time, a professor at Unicamp's Faculty of Education. But his intellectual pathway goes beyond academic norms, and it should be noted that his trajectory has influenced the political and theoretical positions of this author. So, following this introduction, we will firstly address the trajectory and intellectual learning of the self-taught. Then we will discuss how he developed his main work, *Bureaucracy and Ideology*, in his later writings on education. The political routes for linking *means* and *ends* in education are also discussed, following the theme of social struggle and the class self-organisation. We then go on to indicate how the author understands the production of knowledge subservient to power, a link that embodies "academic delinquency". Finally, based on Tragtenberg's ideas, the contemporaneity of his thinking is discussed to inspire analysis of contemporary educational problems.

Trajectory and self-taught learning

Originally from Rio Grande do Sul and grandson of peasant migrants, small landowners from Ukraine, Tragtenberg grew up in the countryside, in Erebango, a city that later came to be called Getúlio Vargas. The peasants of this region were influenced by the libertarian press, had a collective sense of life and work, as Tragtenberg reported in his memoirs, "They were all students and teachers, and they learned at the same time the secrets of cultivating the land [...]" (TRAGTENBERG, 1991, p. 80), were instructed and taught in different languages, and were readers of Russian anarchist authors, especially Tolstoy.

Tragtenberg moved to São Paulo in the 1930s. Having not completed regular education, but being an inveterate reader, his education was markedly self-taught. He used to explain that he attended several universities throughout his life, including bar tables, passing through various political parties, and living with the family of Perseu Abramo³.

² The articles published in the Journal's first ten years, between 1978 and 1988, were: Tragtenberg (1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1986, 1987).

³ Perseu Abramo was a Brazilian sociologist and journalist of Italian descent. He lived in São Paulo, was an active participant in the creation of the University of Brasília (UnB), was a professor at several universities, in addition to having worked as a journalist in the newsrooms of *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo*. In the 1940s and 1950s, Perseu Abramo's family welcomed young Maurício Tragtenberg into a stimulating intellectual environment at many Sunday lunches.

In the 1940s, he was a frequent visitor to the municipal library of São Paulo and made friends with other colleagues who studied there. He was part of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) but was expelled in 1945 for pursuing questions considered inappropriate. Article 13 of the party statute, which prohibited contact with Trotskyist works or groups, was used as the basis for his expulsion. Another focus of cultural dissemination that Tragtenberg attended at the time was the Socialist Party, where he met Antônio Candido, who taught History of Brazil at the party's headquarters. It was Antônio Candido who, in the lobby of the municipal library, suggested that he present an essay as a way of entering the University of São Paulo (USP), a legitimate means to access this institution at the time (MARRACH, 1999).

When he completed the History course at USP, he joined a Secondary School (Gymnasium) in São Paulo and then moved to the Faculty of Philosophy of São José do Rio Preto as a professor. In 1964 he was summarily dismissed as a result of the coup. He was persecuted at the school where he worked, later he had access to the report that the Director wrote setting out which of his activities she considered to be inappropriate or subversive. Her views were published in the 17th edition of *Educação & Sociedade* magazine in the 1980s. This document attests to the claim that Maurício Tragtenberg was a victim in May 1964. In a report sent to the Inspector of Secondary and Normal Education, the Director of the school wrote:

I – As part of the faculty as a secondary professor of General and Brazilian History, Mr. Maurício Tragtenberg, Brazilian, married, graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of the University of São Paulo, removed from this establishment in the 1961 Removal Contest;

II – In this house, in his classes, he indoctrinated young people, abusing the doctrinal freedom of the chair, thus capturing all the students to his ideas. On the occasion of one of the seminars, there was even ridicule of the pedagogical methods of other teachers in the establishment. [...]

V – Through a verbal statement by Professor Maurício Tragtenberg himself, made in the teachers' lounge, it is stated that he had been detained and that his works have been seized for later judgment (EDUC. SOC., 1984, p. 149).

This experience was added to by others, such as his expulsion by the PCB and his employment as a clerk in the Department of Water and Electric Energy of São Paulo, and which formed the basis and inspiration for the building of a historical-critical picture of bureaucratic domination in what became his best-known work: *Bureaucracy and Ideology*. The work resulted from the doctoral thesis defended in 1973 at USP. In it, Tragtenberg carried out a critical and historical analysis of the General Theory of Administration through the analysis of the ideas of Taylor, Fayol, and Mayo.

Bureaucracy and Education

Starting from an in-depth study of Max Weber's thoughts, Tragtenberg shows that bureaucracy is a type of power, corresponding to organisation. "It is a rational system in which the division of labour takes place rationally with a view to ends" (TRAGTENBERG, 2006, p. 171). Therefore, bureaucracy implies "[...] the existence of written rules, hierarchical structure, division horizontal work and impersonality in the recruitment of staff" (TRAGTENBERG, 2006, p. 171).

Under capitalism, the dominant unit of production, industry, becomes bureaucratically managed, and bureaucracy becomes the dominant social factor. Weber expressed the dilemmas of German capitalism, demonstrating that it is necessary to fight the absolute domination of bureaucracy over society. Without social political control that guaranteed political freedom of thought and expression, bureaucracy could be a huge prison ruled by irrationality. In other words, rational bureaucracy can be technically functional at the administrative level while inept at the political level.

Under monopoly capitalism, the theories of Taylor and Fayol brought bureaucratic impersonality, specialisation, organisation by tasks, and the imposition of a system of conduct, to the business plan. “People are alienated in roles, and these are alienated in the bureaucratic system” (TRAGTENBERG, 2006, p. 244).

In his text, *School as a complex organisation*, from 1976, Tragtenberg performs his most intense analysis on the issue of education. This writing was an extension of the ideas present in his doctoral thesis, although in this new text Tragtenberg turned his attention to the school setting. He identifies school as a modern organisation marked by a rigid hierarchy, whose main concern is to form individuals increasingly adapted and adaptable to being a workforce. Achieving these ends presupposes the existence of a pedagogical bureaucracy, structured on a national scale, in the form of a capitalist enterprise, and responsible for the organisation of personnel, the work programme, inspections, and examinations (TRAGTENBERG, 1982a).

Assessments and exams form the axis of the entire school organisation and are intended to develop conformity, which is why these resources are overvalued to the detriment of criteria of effectiveness or value. In another article, *Power Relations at school*, published in the 20th edition of *Educação & Sociedade*, Tragtenberg adds: “[...] the evaluation is no longer an end in itself. The end, which should be the production and transmission of knowledge, ends up being forgotten. [...] What does the proof prove? It proves that the student knows how to do it, it does not prove his knowledge.” (TRAGTENBERG, 1985a, p. 43). In this way, the school conditions more than it forms. The knowledge worked on is restricted to the mechanical accumulation of poorly digested notions or information. The result is a paranoid pedagogy, indifferent to concrete reality, and alien to its end.

The administrative takes precedence over the pedagogic, the bureaucracy within the school is composed of the staff (director, teachers, secretaries) and the line positions (servants, clerks, beadles). Thus, there are several bureaucratic instances that are linked within this complex organisation. Roles are well defined and controlled, teachers must be strict, and parents must not intrude on their work. Teachers, in their relationship with the principal, expect to receive support, either in relation to the students or in relation to their parents. No teacher should criticise their co-workers, especially in conversations with students. The Principal is the mediator between the bureaucratic power of the secretariat and the school as a whole, consequently, he must have the qualities of a politician: “[...] to have administrative sense, be a specialist in human relationships and official reports (TRAGTENBERG, 1982b, p. 40). All this functioning requires, according to Tragtenberg, a good dose of impersonality and dramaturgy: “[...] the cult of appearance, of gestures, has a legitimate value in the bureaucratic structure” (TRAGTENBERG, 1982b, p. 40). Thus, technicist practices prevail at school.

In Tragtenberg’s (1985a) view, the teacher is an agent of social reproduction, “[...] as the guardian of a stratified knowledge, as the priest of educational safeguards, as the prophet of

the need for work and the merit linked to a redemptive effort” (TRAGTENBERG, 1985a, p. 44). However, it is worth mentioning that the author draws attention to the contradictory aspects that may arise from this specific insertion of the teacher in the system, which come to light at the moments of rise of social movement. In these contexts, the teacher can assume a contesting role, whose performance depends heavily on the dynamics of civil society, that is, on determinations coming from outside the school.

To summarise this idea, the school can be a space marked by contradiction, so long as it is linked with the dynamics of external social mobilisation. Under these conditions, the teacher “[...] presses as a questioner of the system, when he claims. This is the ambiguity of the professorial function” (TRAGTENBERG, 2012a, p. 77). It should be noted that the school appears as a contradictory space when its agents contest the system, unlike the prevalent view of authors who were important participants in the educational debate in the transition to the New Republic, such as Carlos Jamil Cury (1985) and Dermeval Saviani (2005), according to whom the contradiction in the school has, as its axis, the knowledge that it is capable of teaching, bearing in mind the dynamics of class struggle and their consequences for the internal dynamics of the school.

Beyond its links with social movements and through its internal organisation, the school fulfils its essentially conservative role, reproducing the social relations between classes when fulfilling the following roles: training the workforce, inculcating the hegemonic ideology through the mechanism of school practices, materially reproducing the division between classes, and contributing to maintaining the ideological conditions of relations of domination. Although not creating the divisions between classes, the school contributes to this division and its reproduction. Therefore, “[...] complex organisations control and domesticate social forces. They encode and centralise” (TRAGTENBERG, 1982b, p. 45).

In summary, for Tragtenberg, there are two conservative functions of the school: 1) the exclusion of students from lower social classes from the education system; 2) socialisation to subordination, that is, the transmission to young people of the values compatible with their future subordinate role.

Through these ideas, Tragtenberg’s thinking is present in the *Educação & Sociedade* magazine when the reproductive aspects of the school are highlighted. In *Educação & Sociedade* magazine, number 4, Tragtenberg’s theses is notorious. The editorial deals with Paulo Freire’s return from exile and addresses the pedagogical disillusionment, which is seen as “[...] a product of the rigid frameworks of the culture of bureaucratic channels [...]” (EDUC. SOC., 1979, p. 3).), with so-called bureaucratic pedagogy being one of the pillars of such disillusionment, as it places “[...] emphasis on strict compliance with the programme, the examination system and student discipline” (EDUC. SOC., 1979, p. 3). The editorial of issue number 8 also emphasises the urgency of thinking about the *ends* of education, which states that “[...] the issue of education is no longer to set up new programmes, new techniques, or new methodologies, while ignoring the purposes, and the structures” (EDUC. SOC., 1981, p. 3).

Social struggles and popular self-organisation: ways to link means and ends in education

His articles published in *Educação & Sociedade* magazine bring experiences of self-management among anarchist education workers that could be thought of as theoretical and practical inspirations for the construction of alternatives for Brazilian education at the time (TRAGTENBERG, 1978). For him, the only way out of the problems faced was to build strategies from the bottom up.

In the 1980s, he was an intellectual present in major newspapers, with columns in *Folha de São Paulo* and *Notícias Populares*. It was not uncommon for him to be interviewed and asked to express his views on political facts. In two *Folha de São Paulo* reports from the period, Tragtenberg expressed his position in defence of workers' autonomy in their struggles, including in education. In the first, he suggests that teachers organise themselves "[...] without getting into little parties and without being tied to the State or rectors, that they overcome corporatism, join all education workers and be constituents of real and authentic political action" (TRETAMENTO..., 1985, unpaginated.). On another occasion, in 1980, in face of the organisation of social movements on several fronts, he stated: "[...] through their constructive practice, the people destroy one of the dominant myths in the country: the popular nullity, the alleged incapacity of the people to practice of self-management, in the need to be tutored, directed, commanded" (PARA TRAGTENBERG..., 1980, unpaginated).

This theoretical and political position is taken up in some editorials in the magazine, in which the presence of Tragtenberg is remarkable: "[...]the struggle for autonomous self-organisation of all employees who, through commissions founded in the workplace, can present themselves and not just represent themselves, is the central point of *Revista Educação & Sociedade*" (EDUC. SOC., 1982, p. 3). The editorial continues defending autonomy vis-à-vis the State, Patronage and political parties and manifesting itself against any imposition of "[...] bureaucratic apparatuses" (EDUC. SOC., 1982, p. 3).

Tragtenberg brought this position to the educators' movement. At the II Brazilian Conference on Education, he coordinated one of the symposia on the Education and popular participation axis, called "When the worker makes education". Three metallurgical workers participated in the symposium: Waldemar Rossi, José Carlos de Brito, and Luiz Heller Giannine; in addition to Célia Pezollo de Carvalho, who had worked with prostitutes on the docks of Recife over the years. Tragtenberg justified her presence at the event: "I thought working with women was very important. One marginalised category is prostitutes within the Brazilian structure, so it is important to listen to her" (TRAGTENBERG, 1982b, p. 176).

Tragtenberg made a brief opening speech highlighting that "[...]worker's self-organisation is the condition for the recovery of knowledge by a class that the ruling class only allows to do so" (TRAGTENBERG, 1982b, p. 176). Consistent with the theoretical positions he defended and with the title of the symposium being "When the educator educates", the coordinator of the round-table called attention to the importance of listening to workers instead of just talking about them and speaking on their behalf - a practice so frequent in university circles. In the end:

He doesn't just do, he thinks. It is important to invite workers to present themselves, and not Tragtenberg, Chauí, or I don't know who else, charismatising these things, that this is the system's game. Every time you charmatise someone, you play the

system's game, and you also stop thinking and transfer your autonomy to think and act to the 'enlightened', who you wait to tell you what to do (TRAGTENBERG, 1982b, p. 177).

The lecturers' presentations addressed the educational experiences of factory workers, from the specific development of their tasks on the production line to the pedagogic aspects of union self-organisation, and in the preparation of strikes and other confrontations with the bosses. Célia Carvalho presented the situation of prostitutes in a region of Recife that she had followed between 1959 and 1974. The workers, many of them aged between 10 and 11 years old, wanted to learn to read so they could prostitute themselves more; faced with this polemic topic and in her interaction with the audience, Carvalho indicated "The problem is a restructuring of society. I think Cuba showed very well that prostitution ceased or decreased in Cuba when the work process was reviewed" (CARVALHO, 1982, p. 193).

So, the symposium linked the theme of education with aspects of the reality of work, both in factories and in the underworld of prostitution. It is an approach to the educational problem that was relatively little explored in the debate at the time, but it was supported by Tragtenberg's defence that it is necessary to connect education with its *ends*, to think about it in connection with concrete reality. The round-table ended with an outcry from Tragtenberg to remove a workers' motion from the II CBE. This topic was the subject of great controversy, later published in the *Jornal da Educação* in its 14th issue. The proposal presented at the II CBE was as follows:

To conclude, just a little question and that was raised informally yesterday, and I think is important for the whole Conference. Here's the thing: a motion will be made in defence of free public education without prioritising areas, because the MEC's strategy is to prioritise some areas to introduce paid education in others. So, common sense advises anyone who is not an education entrepreneur to make a motion in favour of free public education at all levels. Because otherwise we fall into the trap of the discourse of power. [...] It will jeopardise all the work of the CBE if it takes out a manifesto prioritising the first, second or third grades, instead of putting education in general as a priority (TRAGTENBERG, 1982b, p. 201).

The motion was not accepted at the II CBE General Assembly. Célia Carvalho and Doris Accioly e Silva published the text in *Educação & Sociedade* magazine number 14: *When the worker does education: Reflections on the non-approval of a motion during the II Conference on Brazilian Education*. The authors raise several questions about the reasons why the motion would not have been accepted. The motion tabled by the workers, in addition to defending free public education at all levels, suggested the participation of workers in the administration of public schools, as part of a broad project to build an egalitarian and socialist society.

Célia Carvalho and Dóris Accioly explained that the motion was denied on the grounds that there was a need to separate the issue of labour from that of educational. Inspired by Tragtenberg's theoretical analysis, they asked:

Under what circumstances is it necessary to separate 'stages' in the process of the democratisation of society? We recall here the non-separation of *ends* and *means*. Placing the exclusive priority of public and free education removed from the working-class question and without discussing the specificity of Brazilian education at the present time can mean, 'one step forward and two steps back' (CARVALHO; ACCIOLY; SILVA, 1983, p. 127).

Expressing revolt at the assembly's refusal to confront the workers' text, and aggravated by the allegation that it would be paternalism to approve the workers' sole authorship of the text alone, the authors resume the arguments that emphasise the liberal and, therefore, conservative aspects of the defence of the school:

It remains to be seen what paternalism is; solidarity with the autonomous movement of the working class or simple defence of public and free education as an exclusive priority? We cannot forget that the proposal for public and free education is part of the liberal ideology and of the need for the reproduction of capital that has been one of the flags of 'civilised' countries but by no means a guarantee of the democratisation of education (CARVALHO; ACCIOLY; SILVA, 1983, p. 127).

The production of knowledge subservient to power: academic delinquency

In his text, Maurício Tragtenberg repeatedly points out the reproductive and conservative aspects of the school governed by a bureaucratic or paranoid pedagogy. The paranoid aspects of this pedagogy substantiate what the author calls *academic delinquency*, the title of his lecture at the I Seminar on Brazilian Education, published in *Educação & Sociedade*, number 3. In this text, the focus is on universities, institutions that seem to be increasingly adapted to research and the provision of services to hegemonic interests. Delinquency is precisely the expression of, "[...] non-concern with the social purposes of the knowledge produced" (TRAGTENBERG, 1979b, p. 76), in the case of pedagogy courses, the target is the training of technocratic administrators who would then "[...] discuss the *means* without discussing the *ends* of education, making educational reforms that are in fact true restorations" (TRAGTENBERG, 1979b, p. 76).

It was important for Tragtenberg to demonstrate how the University was linked to the maintenance of order and the role that university knowledge plays in society. In a text, originally published in 1978, entitled *Knowledge and Power*, he demonstrates how "[...] power produces a type of knowledge necessary for domination and to what extent this applied knowledge reproduces power" (TRAGTENBERG, 1982c, p. 17). He identifies a whole set of cogs that involve funding and research that privilege what can be investigated solely in accordance with hegemonic interests: "Research is determined not because one is obliged to have a specific theoretical orientation to receive funding but receive funding for having a specific theoretical orientation; it is a determination that operates with a high level of subtlety" (TRAGTENBERG, 1982c, p. 19).

The case analysed in this article is the American case, which demonstrates the utilitarian tendency of its higher education. Such universities revolve around the need to serve companies and the State, although they make declare a neutrality that separates theory and practice. In this way, intellectuals from different areas, including Sociology and Anthropology, collaborate with the genocides carried out by the USA in several countries without questioning the ends of the knowledge they produce:

Social science is reduced to a simple supplier of elements to those who hold power in the USA, to allow their intervention in the economic or social aspects of the real, but the biggest issue is preventing conflict in the region, rather than winning it. Cybernetics serves the automated planning of the counter-revolution (TRAGTENBERG, 1982c, p. 21).

The diagnoses and analysis that Maurício Tragtenberg developed regarding Brazilian education are based on the effects that target it, according to the dynamics of increasing capital reproduction and the process of capitalist development in the country. Industrialisation took place through an unequal and combined logic, in which “[...] pre-capitalist links are subordinated to capitalist relations and form the conditions for their development” (TRAGTENBERG, 2012a, p. 13). The result is the maintenance of underdevelopment, and entire regions left in poverty; in education, rates of illiteracy, truancy and repetition express this dynamic of economic and social evolution.

According to Tragtenberg, industrialisation bequeathed a new value to education in the systems of inter and intraclass relations. The most gifted, obviously the children of the richest families, are the ones who obtain diplomas and are most likely to be in positions that demand qualifications and provide higher remuneration. So, the educational system contributes to ideologically individualise the incapable or *needy*. The so-called *incapable* are poor children who acquire various nicknames that qualify and stigmatise them as empty-headed, stupid, or undisciplined. The student’s social background and school failure are clearly identified: “The school consecrates, at the pedagogical level, those who, according to socioeconomic background, are chosen in advance; it rewards the privileged and penalises the underprivileged, applying to them the label of *needy*” (TRAGTENBERG, 2012a, p. 15).

According to his analysis, it is difficult to reconcile the liberal capitalist ideology of equal opportunities with a country with such unequal and combined development, i.e. the persistence of this enormous inequality in social conditions makes it difficult to take advantage of these opportunities. At this point, Tragtenberg reverses the argument of those who defend the school from this liberal perspective, stating that “[...] pedagogical messianism is short-sighted [...]” (TRAGTENBERG, 2012a, p. 16), because it does not see that formal schooling not only did not save the country, but also did not constitute a generalising factor for the qualification of the workforce: “[...] the less the school has this role, the more it performs as an ideological apparatus, inculcating values and behaviour of the dominant classes in the dominated classes” (TRAGTENBERG, 2012a, p. 16). This statement is based on data from a survey carried out at the time by Helena Lewin, which found that only 56.7% of the active workforce was literate, 68% had incomplete primary education and less than 5% had completed higher education. (LEWIN, 1977).

So, what is formed is an education system that distributes knowledge in a differentiated way and reproduces social classes. Tragtenberg complements this by pointing out that the educational reforms that were being discussed at the end of the 1970s, under the dictatorship, were, in reality, only a change in the appearance of the problems. At the time, technological solutions for Brazilian educational problems produced outside the country were publicised. The wonders of the *means* were repeatedly highlighted, and the *ends*, and the reality of meeting foreign interests were not questioned; and on this point Tragtenberg is incisive:

Ignorance of concrete socio-economic reality cannot be suppressed by any educational technology, however sophisticated it may be. It has the right approach: converting the education system into a grand market for audio-visual trinkets, manufactured by multinationals, and foisted on the poor as the last word in ‘progress’ and ‘modernisation’ (TRAGTENBERG, 2012a, p. 20).

For the self-taught intellectual, any serious approach to Brazilian educational problems needs to confront underdevelopment through structural reforms, both in terms of the agrarian question, and through the intervention of economic mechanisms: “Such elements constitute a precondition for a serious discussion of educational issues and for attempts to resolve its ‘critical problems. Education, above all, must be seen as a public good and not as a commodity to be sold on the academic market” (TRAGTENBERG, 2012a, p. 33). What becomes evident is that the problem only *appears* to lie in education, its origins are, in fact, at the socioeconomic-political level, although there is relative educational autonomy.

Final considerations: Maurício Tragtenberg’s current thinking in times of educational failure

Maurício Tragtenberg’s main contributions to reflections on education and Brazilian scientific production are based on his work *Bureaucracy and Ideology*. In this book, a basic theoretical framework was created in which one can observe the way in which, from the general theories of administration, the burgeoning of bureaucratic organisation occurs, with its norms of conduct and the automation of subjects subjected to a dominant power, across different social spaces, including the school institution as a complex organisation.

Without losing sight of the concrete conditions of an unequal and combined development marked by a dependence on external factors and the maintenance of underdevelopment, Tragtenberg shows how the school, and the production of knowledge, is consumed by an over-emphasis on *means*. Discussions about the school institution and academic production are devoid of questions regarding their *ends*. The absence of these questions leads to the contempt for concrete reality, based on an inequality of social conditions between classes in Brazil.

It is possible that a radical study – one that goes to the root of the problems - regarding the purpose of the school and scientific production in the country would contribute to understanding the debacle that the country faces in this area. What does it mean today to educate for adaptation and conformity? Adaptable to what situation? In the second decade of the 21st century, Brazil has reinforced its agricultural-exports and intensified a process of re-primarisation and deindustrialisation. Its economy is based on degrading the natural environment, deforestation, and wider devastation of natural resources. Proof of this is that, after the MICT and the MEC, the Ministry with the largest budget cut in 2021 was the Ministry of the Environment (ESCOBAR, 2021). In this economic context, the public school system has had to adapt and conform to a reality of lack of paid work and growing poverty.

The paths followed have seen the increasing absorption by the internal dynamics of the school of educational policies that over-develop the individualistic, competitive, generalised relations between the agents that compose it. When the ideology of the entrepreneur becomes a guideline for the pedagogy of schools, an idea is spread that one can succeed despite the astonishing inequality of social conditions that prevent individuals from taking advantage of opportunities.

According to Luiz Carlos de Freitas (2018), in recent decades Brazil has formed its educational policy based on assessments; more than ever, Tragtenberg’s *paranoid pedagogy* has contributed to understanding the direction of education, as assessments and exams that demand the mechanical accumulation of poorly processed notions and information have

guided decisions in this field. These assessments are linked to the accountability of teachers and school leaders, based on meritocracy, and justify financial bonuses to professionals with better results. This dynamic reinforces the role of the teacher as a priest of educational safeguards or as one who praises redemptive effort in the name of merit or bonuses against a background of salary squeezes.

Tragtenberg identifies the short-sighted view of educators who see egalitarian potential in the school as it is currently constituted. Furthermore, he defends the workers' strategy of self-organisation, which demands that the production of knowledge must converge with their interests, and which places the self-management of the school by education workers - including students - as a precondition for school democratisation, as a way to reorder *means* and *ends* in education and to tackle academic delinquency.

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