

Teaching and Research in the Social Sciences

University teaching and research structures suffer universal problems, affecting both humanities and sciences. Here we will deal with some of those related to the social sciences in Latin America. While our observations may be applicable to other parts of the world, this region is the starting point of our discussion.

There is much empirical data to support the argument that current university teaching and research structures unnecessarily slow down the process of learning research skills. In Latin America and many other parts of the world, there is a certain prejudice against teaching research skills before students reach the graduate level. This prejudice is firmly entrenched even in the very field of research teaching. When research skills are taught, the amount of non-professional work assigned to students is much greater than what is strictly necessary. A student's capacity for professional production is underutilized. Preparatory exercises are not kept to an indispensable minimum. The performance of professional standard work is artificially postponed. Learning objectives are set and practised at a sub-professional level. Research seminars, to take one example, do not attempt to assign, in an ascending order of difficulties, professional tasks such as the composition of professional standard book reviews; reports on research trends; reports on field work or exercises; articles for specialized journals; analytical bibliog-

raphies; monographs; or summaries.

University research and teaching structures suffer other problems which should also be pointed out. They hinder the combination of different fields of knowledge which have been separated through division of intellectual labor; and they artificially curtail any possible contact between university students and productive and service industry centers. In other words: university research and teaching structures have no explicit commitment either to relating different fields of knowledge, or to linking study with work. Thus, in the real world to be confronted later, students' possibilities of work and struggle are lessened. Between the two extremes of country converted into university and university isolated from the country, there exists an enormous range of combinations which have not been sufficiently imagined, studied, or put into practice.

There are also problems to do with the theoretical models prevailing in the university. These problems also have to do with the contemporary crisis. The problem of the theoretical models is related to the problem of power. The crisis of theory is related to the crisis of power and the social sectors supporting it.

Insofar as the university offers the opportunity for ideological struggle, there are academic issues which have not been given their due importance. These have to do not only with the crisis of capitalism, with the threat of war, with

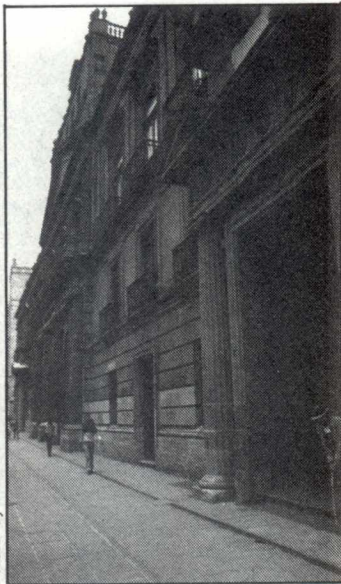


Photo by Rafael Bonilla.

Palacio de Minería (formerly Engineering College), downtown Mexico.

Commission to deal with issues January 6-12, with decisions to be ratified by the University Council on January 28. From January 12 to 28, the commission is to deal with "material conditions for study". After the 28th, the commission is to establish procedures for accomplishing thoroughgoing university reform.
December 18: End of year vacations start.

1987

January 5: Classes resume.
January 6: Negotiations between CEU and Rector's Office reps resume.
January 7-9: Public debate continues.
January 10: Rector's commission presents a ten-point proposal, offering to repeal amendments regarding fees: extend to four years the period for completing high school:



Law School: classes resume after the strike.

Photo from www.igmp.com archive.

"internal wars" and class struggle, with the processes of evolution and revolution, with the processes of liberation and of transition to democracy and socialism. They also have to do with what Anouar Abdel Malek has called the "project of civilization". These issues, vital to both scientific and humanistic culture, are classed as taboo in the theoretical models prevailing in university teaching and research. Some cause immediate mistrust or outbursts of passion, others a kind of academic scepticism towards what is regarded as grandiose. The codified structures of academia are constructed to make one think that serious problems are not serious. And at times this phenomenon occurs even in universities where objective conditions do exist for tackling these kinds of issues. From a lack of consciousness that criticism of the system is seriousness, prejudices are never confronted about what is not really serious, but is believed to be; about what is "non-demagogical" or "non-rhetorical". That is, prejudices about what is in the final analysis apology for the empire and for capitalism.

Among the theoretical models which have also become a kind of administrative and academic structure replete with prohibitions and taboos are those having to do with the history of classes and dominant power blocks in regions with a history of colonialism. Our universities still retain many aspects of what may be described as the University of the "Spiritual Conquest", of the theologian, of the professional guilds, of the monetarist technocrats; the Third World "Dependent University", the exclusive one of its oligarchies. In universities of this kind, real issues are rarely brought up in ideological debate. Concrete and current "colonial" problems do not appear in their curricula, nor in the organization of their work programs. The teaching and research structure in the social sciences does not give due importance to the problem of the culture of conquest within the University, that culture

which has lasted from the days of royal tribute till now, when 50% of the Gross National Product is earmarked for the International Monetary Fund. Nor does it deal sufficiently with the problem of colonial man's "syncretism", or his successor aspiring to be a carbon copy of the Harvard or MIT scholar. Nor with the serious problem of the relationship colonialism-class, people-workers: the ABC of the social sciences in Latin America.

As part of the heritage from the theologian's University, our curricula and programs still emphasize problems of "interpretation", of text "exegesis", of "citing of authorities". From the professional guild University, we have inherited a conception of academic excellence as something corporative, exclusive; we have also inherited problems of relating to the analysis of the historical process as a judicial process. From the technocratic university comes the arrogant current fad of using the "technical" and "scientific" to legitimize policies imposed by multinational capital. The technocrat rules out all research, analysis, or interpretation undertaken from a democratic, popular, and national standpoint.

This legacy and the current fads have not been sufficiently taken into account in analyses of teaching and research programs, methods, and techniques. Moreover, many critics do not study contemporary reactionary thought; they neither understand its techniques nor seek to understand them, but are content with criticizing 19th century political economy. They refuse to learn anything of 20th century systems and models; and thus are incapable of criticizing the political economy, society and culture of what will shortly be the 21st century.

In all militarist and neo-fascist states, university teaching and research structures are plunged into crisis and practically destroyed. The social sciences constitute the chief target for attack. In several Latin American countries, social science departments have been closed down, the books burned, the teachers per-

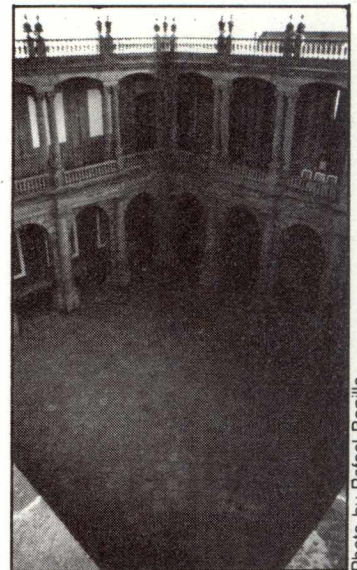


Photo by Rafael Bonilla.

Interior, Palacio de Minería.



Rector's Office commission.

lower high school graduation score to 7 on a ten-point scale; and grant more supplementary exams to pass University courses.

January 12: CEU rally, with significant attendance of STUNAM members, both staff and workers. Strike deadline ratified for January 28.

January 12-15: CEU assemblies to discuss January 10 Rector's Office proposal.

January 15: On the basis of 44 assemblies held on different UNAM campuses, CEU rejects Rector's proposal and issues counterproposal. CEU maintains demand for repeal of all September amendments. March on Mexico City Main Plaza called for January 21.

January 16: The Special Commission resumes discussions. CEU reiterates its rejection of Rector's

secuted. This situation has given the universities a dream-like atmosphere, with teachers and subjects disappeared. Real issues are no longer raised there. But where universities still survive and where it is possible to raise issues, considerations such as those put forward in this article have not been dealt with consistently or clearly. Moreover, considerations along these lines have not been accompanied by another component of vital importance: the development of a culture based on dialog, ideological pluralism, a new distancing and objectivity achieved through committed intellectual activity which is not locked into one doctrine, school

or party to the exclusion of all others, but which is open to all humanist currents of thought, aspiring to make connections between the formal and the informal, between politics, ethics, and power, to achieve a new democratic hegemony of working people and the vast majority of the population.★

Pablo González Casanova

Director of the Center for Humanities Interdisciplinary Research, ex-Rector of the UNAM

(The Spanish original of this article was published in the magazine **Universidad de México**)

The 1986 Budget

	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
1. Teaching	\$88,906,474,471 pesos \$U.S. 238,355,159	63.97%
2. Research	\$24,523,087,174 pesos \$U.S. 65,745,542	17.64%
3. University Extension Services	\$8,206,545,295 pesos \$U.S. 22,001,461	5.90%
4. Administration	\$17,351,959,519 pesos \$U.S. 46,519,998	12.49%
TOTAL	\$138,988,066,459 pesos \$U.S. 372,622,162	100%

¹ At the beginning of 1986, the peso's rate of exchange was 373.00 per U.S. dollar; during the year, it underwent a devaluation of approximately 127.3%

(Information from the *Agenda Estadística 1986*, National Autonomous University of Mexico UNAM), Department of Planning, Mexico City, 1986.

The Challenge: To Renovate University Education

The university's hopes and aspirations must be analyzed in the context of autonomy which, according to Ezequiel A. Chávez, "...results from the university's very nature, from the role the institution is expected to play in society, by the nature of its work... (which is) the fruit... of historic forces that cannot be disdained,... (but that) does not and cannot mean an absurd rending of the University from the society it forms part of, a ridiculous pretension of sovereignty, a monstrous estrangement from the very society in which it finds its own worth."¹

The problems framing the debate around higher education also set the limits for analyses on the subject. In the first place, planning in higher education must take into account the

University's specific conditions, since any attempt to confront current university problems, stripping them of their historic and even political origins, implies danger, foreshadowed in our institution's recent experience with leaving aside either the search for academic excellence or its social commitment. However contradictory they may seem, these factors are not mutually exclusive. To the contrary, our strong democratic roots should always be present in the university classroom, as well as in the rigorous practice of teaching and research. Unless this last idea is taken into account it will be impossible for higher education to go beyond the endless monolog of cloistered ideologies.

This idea is clearly present in the training of

proposal. Rector's reps, on their part, reject CEU counterproposal. Discussions are broken off.
January 20: Rector Carpizo addresses University community in televised broadcast. Rector's Commission refers to University Council the two proposals on which Rector's Office and CEU had been unable to reach agreement.
January 21: Thousands-strong CEU march to Mexico City Main Plaza. That morning, a smaller rally is held in support of Rector's Office position.
January 22: CEU and STUNAM sign solidarity pact.
January 23: Resumption of public discussion between reps of CEU and Rector's Office.
January 24-27: Rector's Office commission agrees to holding of a University Congress, but refuses to accept that such a Congress