

**Education in Mises, Hayek and Rothbard: fundamentals for
extreme privatization^{1 2 3}**

*Educação em Mises, Hayek e Rothbard: fundamentos para uma
privatização extrema*

*La educación para Mises, Hayek y Rothbard: bases para una
privatización extrema*

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Abstract

The paper addresses the scope of privatization in education on Mises, Hayek and Rothbard views, considering its concepts of State, market and individual. The authors providing grounds for questioning compulsory and public education as well as the use of taxes to finance it. They treat public education as indoctrination, identifying formal education as a private decision of the family or, at most, a service provided by the market, refusing education as a right.

Keywords: Privatization of education, Educational role of the State, Duty to educate

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Resumo

O texto analisa a forma como Mises, Hayek e Rothbard discutem abrangência que dão à privatização da educação utilizando como lente os seus conceitos de Estado, Mercado e Indivíduo. Os autores dão bases para o questionamento do ensino obrigatório e público, bem como do uso de impostos para financiá-lo. Tratam a educação pública como doutrinação, identificando o ensino formal como uma deliberação privativa da família ou, no máximo, um serviço a ela provido pelo mercado, recusando a educação como direito.

Palavras-chave: Privatização do ensino, Função educativa do Estado, Dever de educar.

Resumen

El texto analiza la forma en que Mises, Hayek y Rothbard discuten la educación, el alcance que le dan a la privatización en este campo utilizando sus conceptos de Estado, mercado e individuo. Los autores dan motivos para discutir la educación pública y obligatoria, así como el uso de impuestos para financiarla. Tratan la educación pública como un adoctrinamiento, identificando la educación formal como una decisión privada de la familia o, como mucho, como un servicio brindado por el mercado, rechazando la educación como un derecho.

Palabras clave: Privatización de la educación, Función educativa del Estado, Deber de educar

Introduction

In recent years, authors such as Mises, Hayek, and Rothbard have become increasingly popular among non-academic groups in Brazil, especially promoted by the liberal think tank Instituto Mises Brasil (IMB)⁴.

Ludwig von Mises was born in 1881 in Austria-Hungary and died in New York in 1973. His most famous book was *Human Action* (1949). Friedrich August von Hayek, who was influenced by and often acted with Mises, was born in Vienna in 1899 and died in 1992 in Germany. Hayek is the author of greater academic penetration. He won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1974. His best-known book is *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). In 1947, Mises,

⁴ Founded in 2007 by Hélio Coutinho Beltrão, self-declared ultraliberal economist, and brothers Fernando Fiori Chiocca and Cristiano Fiori Chiocca. Its academic director is Ubiratan Jorge Iorio, professor of economics at Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro.

Hayek, and other important liberal authors founded the Mont Pelerin Society, an organization that outlined the principles that would lead to the emergence of neoliberalism.

A disciple of Mises, Murray Newton Rothbard was born in New York in 1926 and died in the same city in 1995. He wrote *Man, Economy, and State* (1962), one of his main works. Rothbard further developed Mises' ideas by adding elements of libertarian jusnaturalism. He built a segment called anarcho-capitalism, thus becoming an important activist of American libertarianism. All these authors are from the Austrian School, whose basic philosophical concept is individualism and, in the economic field, considers that the most efficient way to meet the needs is through the market, without state intervention.

This text aims to theoretically and critically discuss about the education approach of these authors: its nature, the relationship the authors establish between compulsory public education and state indoctrination, and finally, how they see public education funding. It analyzes and complements the important incursion in this field by Brazilian education researchers (Oliveira & Barbosa, 2017), distinguishing itself for using, as its method, a perspective of education based on the concepts of the State, the market, and the individual, which characterize the authors. It also provides a better explanation of the scope of privatization in education in the perspective of Mises, Hayek, and Rothbard.

The authors' ideas were identified by analyzing the following relevant works: *Human Action* (2010a) and *Liberalism* (2010b) by Mises; the text *The Constitution of Liberty* (1983) by Hayek, which clearly addresses the concepts used in this study: the Market and the State, and *The Road to Serfdom* (1990) by Hayek, a classic that criticizes the centralized governmental planning adopted in the socialist countries and Nazi Germany. The first work, written in 1960 combines Hayek's criticism to the Welfare State and liberal democracy. Regarding Rothbard, as it is the only one with a book specifically dedicated to education, we prioritized this material (Rothbard, 2013), complemented by the text *The ethics of liberty* (1998).

State and market, relations with the individual and their consequences

This section shows the concepts of State and Market of these authors and indicates the relation they established with the individual. It also addresses the political consequences of this understanding of the State and the policies focused on promoting social rights.

After such initial considerations, we ask: How do Mises, Hayek⁵, and Rothbard conceptualize the State and define its functions? Unlike classical liberal economists, who did not effectively theorize the State and rather delimited an independent field from economic phenomena, neoliberals attempted to do it because, despite the State is equivalent to coercion for them, they admit that its complete elimination is not possible. By conceptualizing the State as an institution that exerts coercion over the individual, more specifically as the holder of the monopoly of coercion, they define what State is and establish a contrast between State and individual freedom.

This conceptualization explains the State's function, specifying what minimal coercion is in the perspective of Mises and Hayek, promoting the operation of the market and individual freedom, which are characteristics of capitalism. Hayek most closely reflects this theoretical effort, with the State's function even more restrictive in Mises, and falling into an exacerbated subjectivism, moving towards an anarchic extremism in Rothbard.

An important aspect is the greater clarification of how far this minimal action of the State goes, this minimal use of coercion on the individual by the State which holds the monopoly. In Hayek's perspective, it means the State acting as impersonally as possible, without specific guidance and based on known general norms. This is why this author gives importance to legal framework, as it ensures the State provides everyone with the same treatment before the law, without seeking to promote equal economic or social condition of individuals, but rather extending its coercive power to protect individual freedom and property rights. According to Hayek, by exercising such a role, the coercive acts of the State would become parameters for individuals to establish their plans (von Hayek, 1983).

⁵ In this article, we do not present a methodological criticism to these authors. Refer to Augusto (2016) for an ontological criticism to Mises, and refer to Carvalho, Pantoja, and Lucena (2012) for an epistemological criticism to Hayek.

It is important to highlight that Hayek does not consider laws as mere arbitrariness, but the result of the evolution of institutions. He understands contempt for the law as an anti-state or anarchic posture, typical of *laissez faire*, but which we can find especially in Rothbard (1998). Hayek, in particular, admits the State's role of legal framework formulator beyond which the author has his traditional liberal view of criticism to State interventionism and the peculiar view of his school that associates central planning and State interventionism with a gradual move to dictatorship, totalitarianism, and socialism (von Hayek, 1990).

Mises is even more specific regarding the State's role as a means to ensure the functioning of the social system through coercion, maintaining the capitalist social order and its vision of individual freedom and private property. Then, he even limits the scope of the legal apparatus, stating that "the sole purpose of laws and of the social apparatus of coercion and compulsion is to safeguard the smooth operation of social organization" (von Mises, 2010a, pp. 821).

Apart from this function, of minimal use of the State's coercive power to support a more restrictive legal framework than that pointed out by Hayek, Mises highlights that any other type of State intervention would not be adequate. Implicitly fighting the policies associated with the Welfare State, he argues the expansion of State intervention would gradually compromise individual freedom and the capitalist order, ultimately leading to a socialist system. He concludes that policies of social reformism within capitalism are ineffective, understanding the most appropriate way is the economic system without obstructions (von Mises, 2010a).

Ensuring importance to the coercive character of the State, Mises states that government intervention would always mean "either violent action or threat of violent action," then explaining the tax-collecting power the State has. When seeking to define minimal coercion, he states that if taxes are not of little importance, they will affect production and consumption and, more than that, will become an instrument of destruction of the market economy (von Mises, 2010a, pp. 841).

By establishing a direct relationship between the individual and the State and between the State and coercion, Mises practically refuses the State action above this minimal level, observing that State intervention would always be confiscation or donation. In this sense, an intervention would tend to favor an individual or a group of individuals in detriment to another individual or another group of individuals; and even worse, it would often not generate any

advantage to anyone, resulting in corruption, which for him is a natural consequence of interventionism (von Mises, 2010a).

We frequently observe that Mises' criticism to interventionism, or what he calls an obstructed market economy system, leads to an association between interventionism and socialism, in addition to considering the German experience of Nazism to the intensification of state interventionism. For him, the State's role is only to preserve the capitalist order, the only system that can ensure individual freedom.

Mises goes further in this idea of identifying the State as coercion; for him, the State ultimately is "employment of armed men, of policemen, gendarmes, soldiers, prison guards, and hangmen," whose main characteristic would be "to enforce its decrees by beating, killing, and arresting." For him, asking for more state intervention means asking for "more compulsion and less freedom" (von Mises, 2010a, pp. 818).

In summary, although Mises rejects interventionism, like Hayek, he recognizes a role of the State with more restricted functions. He considers that "peaceful social cooperation would be impossible in the absence of an instrument that prevents, by force if necessary, the action of antisocial individuals or groups of individuals" (von Mises, 2010a, pp. 818).

Rothbard agrees with Hayek and Mises regarding the State as a coercive monopoly, but he radicalizes this idea, leading to a view that supports extreme limits to the State so that individual freedom is guaranteed. For him, many of the State's functions could be fulfilled by the market, and it includes the provision of laws. For the author, the laws established by the State rarely coincide with the norms derived from a moral, objective and ahistorical order, identifiable by the individual based on reason. He considers the establishment of laws and the judiciary, the public security, the creation of money, and the post office would not depend on the State for proper provision (Rothbard, 1998).

Rothbard also highlights the police and the courts would allow the State to judge and validate contracts and, more than that, they would give it the power to collect taxes from society. In his view, tax would be theft and the State would be "a huge criminal organization far more formidable and successful than any other 'private' mafia in history" (Rothbard, 1998, pp. 166).

When analyzing the way the three authors conceptualize the State, we see that it is based on the objective fact that the State holds the monopoly of political domination, but it does not

mean the State means coercion. Also, this simplification ends up politically legitimizing the use of State power and the limitations of liberal democracy, aiming to sustain capitalism, dismantle interventionist policies, and implement privatization reforms and extreme privatization.

When identifying the State as pure coercion on the individual, without class mediations that characterize the role of State action and its political struggles, Hayek's political domain, as Brown (2019) observes, becomes narrow with only few attributes for the conception of democracy that covers, besides a mere aspect that must support individual freedom, the capitalist order and market values.

Hayek points out the need to conciliate democracy and individual freedom, emphasizing the benefit of both would only be perceptible in the long term. However, his view of democracy is limited to a "method for making decisions, but not as an authority to determine what decision should be adopted" (von Hayek, 1983, pp. 121). Going deeper into Hayek's view of democracy, Dombrowski (2020) highlights he does not provide intrinsic value to democracy, since it is a simple means and not an end, which may or may not be useful.

In addition, Hayek is conservative with regard to the role of the masses, respecting the will of the majority only if it is restricted to market values. Otherwise, the majority rule would become just demagoguery (von Hayek, 1983). In his view, supporters of liberalism should attempt to persuade the majority to observe the principles of market economy. If it does not happen, using the State power is justified to ensure it. Such view was evident in Hayek's favorable opinion about the neoliberal experiment during the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1970s.

Confirming what we explained above regarding Hayek's view, Dombrowski (2020) explains that, for Hayek, the majority rule would only be legitimate if it was guided by common principles that limit the political power. According to Dombrowski (2020), Hayek identifies such common principles as those based on the liberal movement in Europe, particularly those

Defended by the ancient Whigs, who were present in the Glorious Revolution in England of 1688; they inspired the founders of the USA; and 'were crystallized in that movement across Europe which was known as liberal' (von Hayek, 2006); in particular, 'the idea of a supreme law, which is above our orders and codes' (Dombrowski, 2020, pp. 231).

Following Bobbio's classification of liberalism in the 19th century, Dombrowski observes that Hayek belongs to the group of conservative liberals, who, unlike radical liberals, were not democratic. Conservative liberals, of Anglo-Saxon tradition, always sought to restrict

continued expansion of political and social rights of the masses, as they considered State interventionism limited economic freedom.

This political view of Hayek is detailed by Dombrowski (2020, pp. 232) when he describes how 19th century conservative sociology viewed the masses. According to this perspective, “rational individuals, when they act together with others as a crowd, as a mass that obscures the identity and cools down the moral brakes of the individual, present an irrational behavior,” considering the action of the masses as an authoritarian mechanism. This view is shared by Austrian and many classical liberal theorists, such as Herbert Spencer.

In particular, Herbert Spencer had a violent reaction in late 19th century against the economic and social interventionism in Great Britain (Dardot & Laval, 2016). For him, the State should exclusively guarantee contracts freely established by individuals. He criticized the democratic institutions of the time as an extension of the divine right of kings to parliament and majorities, thus portraying the phobia of the State, typically seen in mid-19th century political conservatism. The same idea about majorities and popular sovereignty can be found in Hayek (1983).

In short, it is through this theoretical approach, based on a political and not just an economic perspective, that Hayek managed to establish the ultimate mechanism for limiting the functions of the State, a theory that restricts the political power of the masses and their political organizations (Dombrowski, 2020). This way, Dombrowski concludes Hayek’s political vision is conservative and antidemocratic, as he places the preservation and development of capitalism and the market above the interests of the masses and democracy. The antidemocratic character of Hayek’s political theory is enhanced when considering that “it does not only lead to setbacks in the political-electoral field, but also implies dismantling of the governmental structure that corresponds to social rights and, ultimately, that it is a theory that denies citizens their the right to have rights” (Dombrowski, 2020, pp. 231).

Mises and Rothbard, with more restrictive definitions of the State’s function than Hayek, support an even more pronounced antidemocratism. By reducing the State to coercion and thereby limiting the spaces for action for the benefit of the masses, the authors support using the State power to restrict political freedoms in order to defend economic freedom. Limited by the focus on the visible relationship of power between the State and the individual, they believe the political domination of the State is equivalent to the direct exercise of State

coercion and the political domain of the State – this last equivalence is explained by Brown (2019) based on Hayek’s work. Then, they disregard the disputes within the State and the political scope and omit the economic domination that is not so visible in the market.

In this last point of view, it is important to highlight that power relations are also seen in relations between companies, mediated by intercapitalist competition, and between the economies of the countries. In terms of production, the basic economic domination of capitalism does not involve direct economic coercion, but relations of power mediated by the market.

However, the view of the authors is based on circulation and exchange, where their view of freedom finds materiality. And this economic freedom based on circulation, which they call individual freedom, is considered to bear supreme value. Their definition of individual freedom is negative, as they see what it lacks, i.e., the absence of coercion or restriction of the individual exercised by the arbitrary will of others. It is the other facet of the idea of the State as coercion, both practically without direct relations with the individual. Confronting the two worlds, of the State and the Market, Mises presents the State as “the world of compulsion and coercion,” which threatens the realm of freedom and private property by subjecting it to “violence, malice, and fraud” (von Mises, 2010a, pp. 824).

The way Hayek and Mises associate the market with the realm of individual freedom seems to have renewed attractiveness in the context of valuing the typical subjectivity of neoliberalism. They do not simply return to the *laissez faire* of the 19th century, providing a view that adheres to the dynamics of globalized capitalism. For these authors, the market would not be an environment or a means, but a self-developing process of discovery and learning, which would discipline and prepare the individual, building subjectivity in its own self-constructed dynamics (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

Hayek describes market as a spontaneous process, based on the creative experiences of individuals, through choices and trial and error. The market would eliminate by selection and competition, the least appropriate individual behaviors, in a cumulative and evolutionary process, which would consolidate and improve habits, social rules, and institutions (von Hayek, 1983).

The market operation logic would be based on the crucial hypothesis that each individual knows little, that knowledge is always individual and that normally it is not possible

to determine who knows more. The individual would act in this context of insuperable dispersion of information (Dardot & Laval, 2016), a dispersion that would expand as civilization advances and becomes more complex. In this logic, changes in the general market conditions lead to changes in how resources are used, changes in the orientation and type of human activities, and habits. The individual would be the vehicle of these changes, making decisions freely based on partial information, according to his innovative capacity and the perception of profit opportunities, and considering rules and codes of conduct consolidated over time (von Hayek, 1983).

The market process as a whole would create and resolve the issues that arise, in a more elaborate version of Adam Smith's invisible hand. The author concludes that decentralization of decisions at the level of the individual and his performance driven by the competition would be the solution to overcome the consequent uncertainty in the world, ensuring the market process as the most effective way to coordinate individual actions performed under partial knowledge of reality.

Through these theoretical artifices, Hayek defines how the market operates without State intervention in an attempt to show the superiority of private logic and the limits of State interventionism. Skeptical about planning and any attempt to shape civilization according to a previously conceived project (von Hayek, 1990), Hayek bases his skepticism on anti-rationalism, which refuses interventionism due to the "inevitable ignorance of all men regarding most of the factors on which the achievement of our goals and well-being depends" (von Hayek, 1983, pp. 45).

Although built in a more elegant way than simple *laissez faire*, Hayek's view of the market relates the market process almost directly to individual action, as if in the economic domain the individual would act only under the restrictions of rules and codes of conduct. For him, any restriction beyond that would come from state coercion. However, this abstraction fails to consider that the logic of capitalist accumulation creates, in production and circulation, structural barriers to economic action and movement of individuals and companies, in distinct time and space.

Mises, when analyzing the individual, considers him as an active being, the *homo agens*, with his approach including not only the market, but all kinds of human action. For him, human action would be translated into an attitude with a given purpose and under a competitive

situation, generating learning for the individual (von Mises, 2010a). He transforms the theory of market prices into a general theory of human choice, with the idea that every individual is his own entrepreneur, with competition and the business model as the general form of society (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

Mises deduces that such ability of self-government of the individual within the logic of the market is based on the freedom to act without interference, with every individual adopting the conduct that best meets his interests (von Mises, 2010a). Hence the refusal of the State's intervention which, in the author's view, would lead to totalitarianism and economic regression. The market order, otherwise, would have the entrepreneur as its base and would promote prosperity of society.

Rothbard's market approach is based on evolutionism close to Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism. Like Spencer, Rothbard considers the primacy of competition in social relations, extending the principle of division of labor to physical, biological and human realities. Using competition between individuals as the basis of humanity progress, he directly applies the same logic of biological evolution to the social dimension, with some alterations when compared to what Darwin proposed, treating competition as the struggle for survival with the prevalence of the fittest (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Rothbard, 1998).

In summary, these authors build their concepts of State and market based on a predominantly evolutionary structure⁶, which unfolds from an almost direct relationship of the individual with the environment, mediated by competition and subjected to restrictions generated by the spontaneous order of the market and coercion mechanisms imposed by the State. However, Hayek and Mises recognize the State has functions, but they are limited. Rothbard is closer to Spencer's naturalist view, both in the State phobia and the view of competition, based on the survival of the fittest. Still, the three authors are influenced by Herbert Spencer and the conservative sociological thinking of the 19th century, especially in their view of the masses and the fact that they consider all advocates of social reforms focused on population well-being as socialist.

This particular way of seeing the State and the market has a great influence on how these authors discuss education and its role in the advancement of capitalism, in the constitution of

⁶ Evolutionism is observed in Mises, but it is sometimes denied by the author, as discussed by Augusto (2016), who finds a more aristocratic than biological argument in Mises.

national States and even in the structure of liberal democracy, by associating compulsory public education directly to State coercion. This topic will be discussed in the following section.

Education in Mises, Hayek, and Rothbard: extreme privatization

In general, Hayek, Mises, and Rothbard do not recognize a strategic role of education in capitalism. Yet, Hayek (1983) admits the advancement in education, despite its high cost-benefit ratio, ensured a faster economic growth in the case of Prussia/Germany, a country he considers a model in terms of the early creation of a National Education System (NES) in the world.

Questioning the path that many countries followed in late 19th century and early 20th century⁷, in order to reproduce the German NES model, some authors tend to emphasize the negative effects of this initiative on the individual and the individual freedom. Education as an element that promotes the development of the country's production, its economic growth, and the strengthening of the State is either not mentioned at all or barely mentioned, particularly the first two aspects, as in Hayek.

Then, these authors present critical arguments regarding the implementation and maintenance of compulsory public NES, contrary to what important educators in Brazil⁸ propose. This approach is based on their State and market views, with some nuances of each author. Despite some of the arguments used by the authors dating back to the end of the 19th century, many of them based on Herbert Spencer, their objective is to criticize the public educational policies of the Welfare State in force in the 20th century. In addition, a more recent dissemination of these ideas under neoliberalism, in Brazil and worldwide, promoted deeper views of privatization also in the field of education.

This section discusses the extent to which these authors use privatization in education, highlighting three aspects: 1) the nature of education for them, the way they see compulsory

⁷ Regarding the NES (SNE in Brazil), its concept, implementation in developed countries, and the structural obstacles to implementation in Brazil, see Saviani (2009).

⁸ Among them, we highlight Saviani (2008, 2014) and Cury (2008, 2014).

education and its relationship with the socioeconomic development of countries; 2) the role they give to the content of formal public education and the relationship between this content and the State; 3) the role of public funding and education at levels beyond elementary education.

Regarding the nature of education, it is, for these three authors, a parental activity or a mercancy or service the market must provide. As a mercancy, the best way to provide education is through the private school market. Only Hayek admits compulsory education at the elementary level – at this level, a responsibility of the State – and implicitly a right of the child that may be funded by the State. However, for Hayek, the provision of elementary education and education in general must be primarily private funded.

Oliveira and Barbosa (2017) highlight Mises' view against compulsory education, which he considers to be a voluntary activity of parents or a service provided by the market. Based on Mises, Rothbard (2013) further develops the idea of education as a voluntary parental activity, based on simple precepts, not linked with formal education. That would only be a part of education, with formal education also being provided directly by the parents or through a tutor. These two forms of formal instruction are what Rothbard finds most suitable as they are individualized. With this view, Rothbard is the author with the strongest support to *homeschooling*, according to Celeti (2011) and the views of Instituto Mises Brasil⁹.

In cases where these two individualized education options cannot occur, Rothbard (2013) argues that formal education could be a service provided by private schools. Rothbard considers private schools are more capable to meet the various parental demands than public schools. In this case, as a mercancy, education would be governed by the logic of consumer preference – of parents or the individual himself, if an adult. For the author, public schools would be an ultimate resource only for those who cannot afford a private school or have no time or resources to educate their children at home. Therefore, Rothbard is opposed to compulsory education, as education for him is a voluntary parental function or a service provided by the market without State regulation.

On the other hand, Hayek understands that only elementary education would be a service of a public nature to be provided by the State, considering its impacts on society and democracy. He points out that democracy is unlikely to function properly when people are

⁹ Views supported by the articles on education that can be found on its website: <https://mises.org.br/>.

partially illiterate (von Hayek, 1983). For these reasons, elementary education should be compulsory, because, in the perspective of society and the country, the risks would be much smaller if this happened and the benefits would be much greater if everyone shared certain basic knowledge and convictions. Even recognizing the need for compulsory education at this level, he considers the educational offer should be primarily through private schools. At the other levels, education would be a service/mercancy provided by the market. Hayek considers that compulsory education at its most basic level should have public funding, and that it should be for families with financial issues. However, public funding would not mean public offer of this service.

To summarize this first aspect that supports extreme privatization in education, the authors focus on the individual, the family and their freedom to choose between formal education as a parental activity or provided by the market, with public provision only in specific cases. This perspective is based on their concept of the State's role and individual and market freedom.

Our second aspect to analyze the extent to which these authors use privatization in education is the role they give to the content of formal public education and the relationship between this content and the State. Of note, all authors agree in this aspect, presenting the most destructive criticism to the NES and supporting homeschooling (Oliveira & Barbosa, 2017) and the ideas of “school without party” (Salles, 2017). For them, the NES would be a mere resource of political indoctrination to sustain a strong and interventionist State and its expansionist policies. In other words, under compulsory public education, the more widespread it is, at different levels of education, and the more comprehensive and regulated its content, the stronger the indoctrination.

According to the authors, just like the State reduces individual freedom, education provided and controlled by the State is seen as particularly dangerous. For them, the NES would place excessive power in the hands of the State, so it would control the masses (von Hayek, 1983). So, their limited view of the State and democracy reduces the role of public education in capitalism.

In this aspect, Hayek, Mises, and Rothbard share Spencer's view that the NES would be a strong threat to individual freedom. All three authors observe that in different countries, using the NES as a mechanism to consolidate and strengthen the State. As they do not highlight

the role of education in capitalist development, the aspect that prevails is Leviathan political power expansion.

It is correct to consider that NES was historically used as a tool to impose and standardize the language and culture of politically hegemonic power. It acted as an important mechanism of nation building, and the stimulus to nationalism is one of its developments, as pointed out by Hobsbawm (1988). Seen only as a need of the State for its own benefit, State interventionism in the form of the NES is a threat to individual freedom due to language and nationality imposition, according to these authors.

Mises further emphasizes this aspect when discussing the relationship between countries and the maintenance of peace, attributing world conflicts not to imperialist disputes, typical of late 19th century, but to State nationalism fueled by the NES. He observes that “repeated adherence to the policy of compulsory education is fully incompatible with the efforts to establish lasting peace” (von Mises, 2010b, pp. 132). On the surface of the phenomenon, he points out that NES would have notably increased the conflicts in the extensive areas of the globe where there was or there is linguistic, religious, and cultural heterogeneity by imposing a standard language and an associated nationality (von Mises, 2010b).

Reducing the existence of the NES and the State regulation of curricular content to the promotion of nationalism, Mises defends the restriction of education content to the minimum necessary, considering that expanding this content would mean opening space for stronger State indoctrination. He observes the content should be “limited to the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic,” thus avoiding its use by the ruling party to disseminate its ideas and defame those of its opponents (von Mises, 2010b, pp. 132-134).

For Mises, the risks of indoctrination would increase in secondary education, particularly in subjects like history¹⁰, which for him is strongly influenced by nationalism. According to the author’s view of the teacher and education, the social philosophy of the teacher or the author of textbooks would influence the historical narrative. Mises summarizes his understanding observing that teaching history in secondary schools and university preparatory courses would be indoctrination. His view of student training, the teacher’s role and its relationship with

¹⁰ Regarding Mises’ view about history, refer to Augusto (2016).

content teaching is influenced by an approach restricted to minimum instruction (von Mises, 2010a).

Rothbard (2013) goes even further. His analysis is based on Spencer's arguments, considered by him the greatest critic of compulsory public education. Spencer understands compulsory education as pure despotism, a mechanism used by the State to change people into "good citizens," in the State's perspective. For Spencer, compulsory education would be "the cornerstone of State tyranny growth" (Rothbard, 2013, pp. 42), which could abolish individuality in detriment to uniformity and obedience to the State, providing knowledge at the expense of harming the character of the individual (Spencer, 1913).

This interpretation of the State and public education directly associates a strong and interventionist State with nationalism and State tyranny, and considers the implementation of the NES and compulsory education as one of its important foundations. According to this view, State indoctrination becomes a natural consequence of this broader process of State strengthening through the expansion of interventionism that would ultimately direct the country towards totalitarianism. It identifies educational policies as means to shape citizens and strengthen the power of the State, supporting an antidemocratic and politically conservative perspective in education, opposed to education as a right, for significantly losing its social value.

The second argument they use regarding the issue of educational content is that in compulsory education it would be standardized and uniform, a view mainly observed in Rothbard, and based on Spencer. For the latter, there would be no possibility of consensus among parents about the proper content and method in compulsory public education, making homeschooling and private schooling better choices to fulfill the preference of these consumers (Spencer, 1913). State regulation of content would also harm private schools, which would lose their freedom to serve the diverse demands of parents. Rothbard says that, with the coercive monopoly of the State, it would be unable to instruct in an environment of freedom (Rothbard, 2013).

The aristocratic bias of this argument is seen in the author's idea that public education would destroy independent thinking by suppressing individuality and focusing on equality and uniformity. In his view, it would eliminate the freedom of more skilled children/adolescents, leveling them with the "less educable," in addition to exterminating the educational role of the home (Rothbard, 2013, pp. 14-21). Then, he argues the individual would not advance in formal

State education governed by equality and uniformity, considering that, in order to support weaker children, education would be leveled too low.

For the author, in compulsory public education, there would be an emphasis on the group, with mass education having a role of adjusting every child to the opinion of the majority. For him, groups would have no affirmative value when considering that “children are taught to seek the truth in the opinion of the majority, and not in their own independent investigation, or in the intelligence of the best in each field.” For him, in mass education, the content would be superficial and without guidance, with children doing what they like, generating school graduates “ignorant of elementary reading and spelling, and [who] cannot write a coherent sentence” (Rothbard, 2013, pp. 61-62).

The third argument these authors use to criticize the content of compulsory public education is that it involves an “attempt to transfer all functions of the home to the State,” in a view of the family role in child education that goes beyond primary socialization¹¹. This approach is mainly seen in Rothbard and, to some extent, in Mises as well. For them, the school would have to provide only the minimum instruction and not try to shape a child’s personality and values. Rothbard, in agreement with Spencer, believes that influencing the perception of the world of children and adolescents would violate the right of parents to educate their children in the way they consider most appropriate. This author emphasizes the importance of voluntary education and moral and religious “neutrality” in public education, thus avoiding State tyranny (Rothbard, 2013, pp. 59-62).

All these authors share the idea that compulsory public education is ultimately an instrument of government indoctrination by the ruling government and the State in the political, moral, and cultural fields. Most arguments they use are old, many from the 19th century, strongly based on the view of the State as coercive monopoly, in a conservative political concept associated with the perspective of the market as the reign of freedom. They also consider one of the roles that public school played in a very specific historical moment of consolidation of national States in Europe, the United States, and Asian countries. For this reason, they support the idea that compulsory public education would always have the role of State indoctrination.

¹¹ For a more comprehensive approach to the role of family and school in child socialization, see Cury, in a text that discusses homeschooling (2006).

These last arguments are based on common sense and fail to consider public school in its historical period, subject to transformations and contradictions. They also show old ideas have recovered strength under neoliberalism, that indoctrination exists in public schools, that public schools do not meet the individual needs of children and adolescents and do not encourage skilled students.

To summarize this second aspect regarding extreme privatization, the authors identify in public education content a strategy of the State to indoctrinate citizens, in order to strengthen and justify its coercive power. They also see the public provision of this service by a coercive institution in a standardized and uniform manner does not meet the different needs of consumers and affects individual freedom by imposing uniformity and equality. All these aspects are logically derived from their view of the State as coercion, the specific functions they consider the State should have, and the antidemocratic and politically conservative political conception emerging from such perspective.

Finally, the third aspect we have defined to discuss privatization in education, according to these authors, refers to the “economic” restrictions they establish to public funding and the role of the State in education beyond elementary school. About public funding, only Hayek accepts it and explains how it should work, reinforcing the conception proposed by Friedman (2014). For him, only elementary education should be funded by the State, using a voucher system, in which a minimum standard would be defined for all schools participating in this system, as proposed by Milton Friedman¹². Public primary schools would be located in isolated communities for a limited number of children, with transport conditions not allowing children from larger urban centers, or public schools surviving competition with private schools would be supported by vouchers used by families (von Hayek, 1983).

Of these authors, Hayek and Mises also discuss higher education. Mises expresses dispersed opinions about public universities and is more interested in how economics is taught. Their analysis of public universities, teachers, content, and research profile is highly unfavorable.

Hayek’s focus is predominantly on the types and limits of public funding for higher education. He does not consider access to higher education as a right, disagreeing with the idea that “everyone intellectually capable of acquiring higher education is entitled to it,” mainly

¹² Friedman’s view of education is well developed in Oliveira and Barbosa (2017).

because, for him, it is not a general interest, in contrast with the need to ensure funding of compulsory minimum education for everyone. He says that, even in rich countries, it would be expensive to fund higher education with public resources for a large group of the population (von Hayek, 1983, pp. 366-369).

Also, Hayek observes the low economic return of this type of expenditure would justify the access to higher education only for a small elite that could be served by private universities. For him, in cases that involve vocational training only, the income would be individual related to invested capital. For such cases, he recommends loans to be paid later by debtors with some of their incomes. Only in specific situations with advantages not only for the student, but for the entire community, he considers the government funding to higher education as justifiable. Finally, highlighting his antidemocratic and politically conservative bias, he says the existence of proletarian intellectuality, which does not find the means to use its knowledge, would be a serious threat to the political stability of a country (von Hayek, 1983).

The view of Hayek and Mises that favors private education leads to a strong criticism of higher education massification in developed countries. For Hayek (1983), this would have transformed universities into a mere continuation of school instruction, considering that only “the universities that offer master’s and doctoral courses – and, in fact, only the best of them – still dedicate themselves mainly to the activities that characterized European universities in the last century” (von Hayek, 1983, pp. 376).

Mises strongly and ideologically disqualifies public universities, labeling them as “socialist seedbeds” dominated “by the ideas presented in the Communist Manifesto and in the Programme of the Communist International.” For the author, they would have the influence of the ruling party, appointing teachers with similar ideas to those of the government and assuming the role to disseminate such ideas, thus promoting the reign of State interventionism and ultimately directing students to socialism. In his view, teachers would be uncreative and bureaucratic and, in the case of economics courses, excessively specialized, focused on history and statistics instead of mastering what they consider to be the true economic theory. For him, many creative economists would not be found in universities (von Mises, 2010a, pp. 986-990).

In short, the approach of these authors to education under different aspects underlies a broad and extreme privatization in this field and questions the creation of a National Education System for compulsory education, public education, and the use of taxes to fund levels above

the elementary education. Public education for them is a mere source of indoctrination, then the more comprehensive it is, the bigger the problem and the risk of having uncomfortable majorities. Family, an extreme locus of private instruction, would be the ultimate sphere of definition of education scope and content, with education reproducing the status quo of society, without any emancipatory role. Education funding with public resources would be limited to elementary education, provided through vouchers that would predominantly fund private schools.

Conclusion

Hayek, Mises, and Rothbard endorse the rejection of the State's actions in education and the educational policies formulated and implemented by the State, supporting extreme privatization in this field. These authors refuse the economic and social interventionism of the State, associating it with a gradual move towards socialism. State action is only accepted to ensure a legal framework to support the free market and capitalism.

This view, which considers the surface of the phenomena, reduces the role of State's political domination to strict coercion, highlights its apparatus of power, and refuses it as an arena of political struggle of social classes under the domination of capital and its role that mitigates capital versus labor tensions. The role of the State as guarantor of long-term reproduction of the capitalist system and the intrinsic relationship between the State and capital, according to different accumulation regimes over time, does not appear in this type of surface analysis. Reduced to coercion, the State is almost directly opposed to the individual and to companies, and is associated with restriction of individual freedom. It fuels the phobia of the State, when Rothbard considers, for example, taxation as theft and the State as a criminal organization.

This conceptualization of the State politically legitimizes the use of power to guarantee capitalism, dismantle interventionist policies, and even implement privatization reforms. The authors support using the State power to restrict political freedoms in order to defend economic freedom. Under the influence of Herbert Spencer and the conservative and anti-democratic

sociological thinking of the 19th century, they consider all advocates of social reforms focused on population well-being as socialist.

Focusing on the dimension of circulation, their concept of individual freedom is restricted to the act of exchange, since the idea of equality, in relation to the legal framework, is unattainable in practice. However, even in the strict dimension of circulation, they disregard the coercive forces in the form of capital concentration and centralization as an effect of intercapitalist competition between companies and between countries. Without going into the dimension of production, they omit the coercive and exploitative relationships seen in the capitalist relationship and workers, which are invisible in the dimension of circulation.

With their view of the individual, the State and democracy, they do not give education a relevant role in the socioeconomic development of countries and the promotion of citizenship, considering the costs of creating an NES for individual freedom above the acceptable limit. They see education as a parental activity and formal education as a mercancy/service the market must provide.

Since education is a service for them, they see the private school market as the best way to provide education, because they support free choice – of the individual or the family – as the nature of formal education. Only Hayek admits compulsory education at the elementary level and, only at this level, as a responsibility of the State, implicitly a child's right, and may receive State funding through vouchers distributed to families. Mises and Rothbard, on the other hand, question compulsory education, the National Education Systems, and the use of taxes to fund the NES; in other words, education as a social right.

The three authors argue that both a direct provision of formal education by the State and the State regulation generate risks of indoctrination of values and standardized and uniform education, thus affecting free choice. Larger public network and multiple education levels offered by the State increase such risks. Regarding educational content, State schools, if any, should stick to minimum content to reduce the risk of indoctrination. Family is the ultimate group that defines the scope and content of education. According to these authors, extreme privatization goes beyond typical concepts, as they focus on the family and on the reproduction of the status quo of society, without any emancipatory role.

Finally, to support individual freedom, they focus on the family and generalize the idea that only the market and its practices are effective, confronting the historical struggles for

education, based on the creation of the NES, the compulsory public and tax-funded education, although restricted to liberal democracy. Under the ideas of neoliberalism, with the expansion of its private culture and normativity, challenges will be greater in education in countries that have not yet created an NES.

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