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Opinion – Sou Ciência: Why are the Public University and Science on the wane?

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The answer to this question is simple: in the last 5 years, Federal Universities accumulate a budget loss of 30% in resources for their maintenance costs and of more than 90% for those destined to works, renovations, purchase of books and equipment. .

And the future? It gets complicated… Once again we see the federal government's scythe reap the budget of the Ministry of Education, where the Federal Universities (IFES) are linked, with a reduction in 2022 of 30% in the budget for the operation of universities in relation to to the previous year. Not counting other cuts that affect the research system, Fiocruz alone lost 11 million. The sum of losses and the new cuts will bring incalculable damage to scientific research and the training of young professionals of the future.

Federal Universities and Institutes depend directly on the resources established in the Annual Budget Law (LOA), which has suffered strong reductions each year, especially from 2019. CAPES, CNPq and the National Scientific Development Fund also depend on these same resources. and Technological (FNDCT), fundamental for the financing of research in all state and federal public institutions in the country.

Once again, the university community is baffled by the relentless toil of the federal government to harm universities, science and the future of young people and the country itself. Even in the face of a pandemic that has lasted 2 years and the numerous activities developed to face and fight the coronavirus, universities received more cuts in response.

An intense movement of professors, scientists and graduate students was organized so that the 2022 LOA would resume the corrected values ??of 2019, even if they were already insufficient. Although CAPES had an increase in the budget for the year 2022, reaching just over 3 billion, these values ??do not even reach the amount obtained in 2019, which was 3.2 billion. Data calculated by Professor Nelson Cardoso Amaral, from the Federal University of Goiás and a researcher at SoU_Ciência, show that CAPES reached 8 billion in 2014 and 10 billion in 2015. This clearly shows the size of the difficulty we face, remembering that the CAPES is the MEC body responsible for graduate programs and research grants.

The budget of the Ministry of Science and Technology was not spared either. In the last 3 years, it has undergone significant cuts and contingencies, especially from the FNDCT and FINEP (Financier of Studies and Projects), essential to support the infrastructure of laboratories, equipment and buildings for research. The CNPq, which in 2013 had a budget greater than 3 billion, has been hit hard, and its budget in 2022 will be just over 1 billion. The body is essential for the maintenance of research grants, but it became almost unfeasible in the years 2020 and 2021, requiring additional and emergency resources to fulfill part of its commitments. And demand continues to grow, with last year only 13% of successful candidates for grants had signed contracts. It is not, therefore, without reason that Brazil loses its best brains to other activities or other countries, risking its own future.

Unfortunately, the serious situation will deteriorate in the institutions: from the risk of fire, due to lack of maintenance of the structures, to the impossibility of guaranteeing sanitary conditions for the safe and complete return of the face-to-face activities of the university community. Only existing books and equipment. The needs for cleaning, testing, adaptations of ventilation structures due to the pandemic, will remain for an uncertain future. In fact, it is already a real miracle that they are working and the Universities will continue to seek palliative solutions so as not to interrupt their mission.

But how much longer can they hold out?

During the year 2022, it will be necessary for them to work on several actions simultaneously. First, ensuring that the approved budget is fully applied, as nothing guarantees the absence of contingencies. It is imperative that the current parliament makes this commitment. At the same time, it is necessary to start the work of recomposing the budget, thinking about 2023, proposing a plan to recover what was lost, since the effects of the budget recomposition will not be felt immediately. Furthermore, it is necessary to make commitments with future governments and legislators so that the budget continues to be recomposed in subsequent years. To do so, it is necessary to change policy, with a government that supports universities and science in defining the country's strategic development and qualifying public policies. What we see, on the contrary, is a government committed to attacking the Science and Education of its young people.

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Brazil cannot continue in deficit with Education and the future of Science. We should have reached 7 million enrolled in Higher Education by 2023, but we have been stagnant since 2017. The good performance of Science today is the heir of investments made between 2009 and 2015. The situation is dangerous, many researches are stopped or have been postponed, which will have consequences and losses in the near future. It’s just not worse, because the state research support foundations, such as FAPESP, are still performing their duties. Despite the losses and challenges, the scientific community continues to act and seeks changes, as it wants to regain hope, lost time and grow again. A country that has Education and Science has a future, and we want our future back.

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