NEWS BULLETIN 24/7
Publicado em 08/07/2022 - 08:07

Opinion – Sou Ciência: Science will guide us to the Brazil we need

The National Science Day, celebrated on July 8, was created by law in 2001 and later reaffirmed as Researchers' Day by another law in 2007. The date also celebrates the anniversary of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC) , founded in 1948, and, in 2022, marks the first year of existence of our study centre, SoU_Ciência.

Although the 8th of July is remembered every year, perhaps, this particular year, the date is celebrated very differently compared to previous celebrations. Today, after more than 2 years of a pandemic that marked our generations, to which we lost thousands of lives in Brazil and which still threatens us, to do science is to resist setbacks and celebrate life.

In spite of all attempts to deny science, of all efforts to deny the importance of our universities and research institutes, we are standing. Despite part of the federal government and the current rulers trying to scream, kick and overlap, we keep working.

Certainly the costs of these efforts are high for researchers, but we also carry the certainty that we are strong and that our institutions, which are at the service of our country and our people, will not be overthrown.

With joy we saw, in this same period, that the more we were called "fat zebras", among other attacks, the more we showed the population the installed capacity to do science and contribute to society – a capacity acquired by years of work and investments by governments previous to this one.

As we celebrate the first year of studies by SoU_Ciência, which brought together more than 25 associate researchers and 36 members of its Scientific Committee, from different institutions, with the support of resources from the Federal Budget, Fundação Tide Setubal and Instituto Serrapilheira, and in the dissemination by As part of Folha de S. Paulo, we are also making two significant deliveries to society.

Research results that may help in the debates for the upcoming electoral moment. The panel of the Federal Universities in Defense of Life, for example, was developed in collaboration with Andifes (Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education) and shows how a good part of our universities organized and acted during the pandemic.

This is an important survey, which presents more than a thousand actions carried out in more than 500 municipalities and distributed in 5 major axes. The areas of research, telehealth, communication and the fight against hunger are highlighted. Still in 2022, more data will be released not only on federal universities, but also on state universities and other research institutions, such as Fiocruz.

The second Panel, carried out with the support of the Serrapilheira Institute, compiled and analyzed a survey on the funding of federal universities over the last few years, showing the collapse that these institutions suffered, with more than 50% drop in funding and of 96% in investment resources.

The platform also shows the very important role of State Research Support Foundations and how they helped to maintain this period of extreme difficulties. But what was most surprising was the realization not only of the brutal cut in resources from the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development (FNDCT), but also its deviation from its purpose.

In other words, resources that were raised specifically to be invested in Science were "confiscated" by a maneuver of the current government and redirected to the Treasury. Once again, Science and Education were harmed to the detriment of other interests.

Despite this, a large part of the population trusts public universities and science, as shown by an opinion poll by SoU_Ciência. Proof of this is that the credibility of Brazilian scientists, especially those of public institutions, has increased by more than 40% in the last 3 years. While scientists have gained credibility, professional politicians are moving in the opposite direction and still need to improve their performance a lot to gain strength in society.

Anyone who can really understand this message and the importance of scientific work for the country's development will understand what is at stake. We, as Brazilians, deserve and must elect politicians who are truly committed to Education and Science. May this be one of the lessons learned from the pandemic.

On this National Science and Researcher Day, let's celebrate our ability to act and transform even in the face of the most adverse conditions. Let's celebrate life!

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