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Choosing a new president will seal the fate of public universities

The government of Jair Bolsonaro (PL) recorded a 94% reduction in investments destined for federal universities in the last four years. Of the 21 existing research institutes in the country, 19 had a budget drop between 2019 and 2021. The data are from the Sou Ciência Studies Center.

The survey numbers show that the National Institute of Study and Research (Inep) suffered a reduction of almost 52% in transfers; the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), which promotes scientific research, presented a 65% drop in the budget, while the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), which grants master's and doctoral scholarships, had a decrease of almost 70% of the resources.

Understand: "Imbrochable" is the synthesis of Bolsonarism: "Fragile masculinity", points out psychoanalyst

This is what happened to the former doctoral student of the Graduate Program in Biochemistry at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), José Henrique Freitas. He lost his CNPq scholarship after almost three years dedicated to research and had to stop his studies in the middle of the pandemic.

"Postgraduate programs are one of the main means of scientific production in our country. If you don't have support to increase the number of scholarships, which are necessary for the student's permanence, and you don't think about students during the pandemic, the gap increases. Like me, many people didn't finish their master's or doctorate because they didn't have the scholarship and had to go out to work and continue living", he says.

José Henrique is also the general coordinator of the UFC Graduate Students Association and warns of the dismantling that resulted, only in the graduate course of the Biochemistry course, in the cut of 51 scholarships in the years 2019 and 2020, under the allegation that they were idle vacancies. "This is all a reflection of a government that never thought about Science and Technology and that, in addition to promoting dismantling, fuels a hatred of what is produced or discussed in the academic world", emphasizes Henrique.

In 2019, still during the first year of government, Bolsonaro tried to privatize universities, proposing the debate on tuition fees in the National Congress. He also interfered with the constitutional precept on the autonomy of higher education institutions by disregarding the most voted in elections with a triple list in 40% of the nominations of deans in the country. In Ceará, the academic community saw Cândido Albuquerque, last place in the vote, be chosen by President Jair Bolsonaro as the UFC's dean.

In this context, practices such as cutting scholarships, denialism, fake news and persecution in university environments are elements that, together, are compromising the work of science and the development of higher education. That's what academics across the country denounce. As well as resistance against social ethnic quotas, an instrument of social and historical reparation, which encourages the entry of indigenous and black students into universities, a space where Brazil's social inequalities reflect the different realities found on the country's campuses.

For the PhD in Brazilian Education by the UFC and Pro-Dean of Student Affirmative Policies at the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab), Mara Rita Duarte, the current government condemns the equality policies instituted in the country. "The Bolsonaro government has in its structure the neo-fascism that condemns the policy of racial equality, affirmative action, quota policies for people with disabilities and condemns, mainly, the black and the poor being in public college. We work with African students with the mission of repairing the historical damage caused to certain populations and countries, due to slavery in Brazil with the consent of Portugal. From 2019 onwards, we had a gap of 800 students because there was a remarkable impoverishment and we are unable to provide assistance to all students", explains the professor.

In June, the Ministry of Education (MEC) suffered a cut of BRL 739.9 million in the 2022 Budget. The measure resulted in a reduction of BRL 55.3 million in the transfer of funds to UFC, Unilab, Universidade Federal do Cariri (UFCA) and the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Ceará (IFCE). Mara Duarte, lists the fall in university budgets and shows concern about the impacts on the MEC budget, especially in institutions in the Northeast. "Here, the scenario worsens much more, due to the socioeconomic realities of university students and the regional reality, pointing out severe disparities in relation to other regions of the country. Faced with these cuts and blocks, institutions will not have enough resources to finish the academic year in 2022. Students will not have their grants and scholarships, every University will be at the mercy of political goodwill to comply with the payments of their contracts and to maintain their open doors", he emphasizes.

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Cuts and blockages, which hamper the development of research and higher education in Brazil, are added to the denunciations of irregularities in the MEC during Bolsonaro's administration. The Report of the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) and the Corregedoria-Geral da União (CGU) for 2021, show a deviation of almost BRL 18.8 billion mapped by internal affairs technicians as distortions in the National Education Development Fund (FNDE) – which is at the center of the scandal of the press-appointed Bolsolão of the MEC.

With the return to classes, after two years of remote teaching, the academic losses were added to the budget shortage and made clear the problems faced by the academic community. Teachers and students made a series of complaints about abandonment and precarious infrastructure on the federal campuses of Ceará. In addition to stopped works, broken equipment accumulates without maintenance. The situation was confirmed by the Union of Teachers of Federal Universities of the State of Ceará (ADUFC-Union), which in May, carried out an inspection to check the complaints received.

For Professor of the Department of Literature at UFC, Irenísia Oliveira, vice-president of ADUFC-Sindicato, the country is experiencing a decline. "In all aspects, there is a setback with consequences that will be felt by all Brazilians, be it the expulsion of the poorest from the university, the lack of qualified personnel and technological solutions, the reduction in efficiency and the financial costs that all this represents. . At UFC, the situation is further aggravated by the attacks on university democracy and the authoritarian management of the intervenor, who persecutes professors, technical-administrative staff and students. We fight for this attack on the country's future to be reversed as soon as possible with Bolsonaro's defeat in the next elections", defends Oliveira.

Lula government numbers are impressive

From the analysis of data released by the MEC, in terms of comparison, the federal budget allocated to all higher education in 2021 was BRL 5.5 billion, less than half of the BRL 14.4 billion reserved for public universities in 2014, during the first Lula government (PT). Adding the two terms of the former president and Dilma Rousseff (PT), higher education had the biggest expansion in its history, with the creation of 18 new universities and 178 new campuses in 295 municipalities. As a result of these policies, enrollment in higher education increased from 3.52 million in 2002 to 8.03 million enrollments in 2015.

The change in the profile of university students was also visible. With the quota policy, in 2019, for the first time in the country, blacks and browns became the majority of students at federal universities. It was also during the Lula government that farmers saw their demands for the creation of degrees focused on the countryside, such as the Intercultural Indigenous course and the Rural Education course, among other courses that had resources cut in the Bolsonaro government.

The creation of the University for All Program (Prouni) in 2004 allowed thousands of low-income students to access private universities, with the granting of full or partial scholarships, as well as the expansion of the Student Financing Program (FIES) . policies that also had their resources reduced by Bolsonaro.

Another program that reached important figures was 'Science without Borders', created in 2011 by former president Dilma Rousseff to encourage the integration of training with the outside world, especially in technological areas. According to the Portal of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC) more than 104,000 students were benefited until in 2017, shortly after the impeachment, the Program was finalized by then president Michel Temer (MDB).

Government plans of presidential candidates

In his government plan, candidate Lula says that "the country will once again invest in quality education, in the right to knowledge and in the strengthening of basic education, from daycare to graduate school, coordinating articulated and systemic actions between the Union, the States and the , Federal District and Municipalities, resuming the goals of the National Education Plan (PNE) and reversing the dismantling of the current government". The candidate also assures "the commitment of the new government to an educational recovery program concomitant with regular education, so that they can overcome this serious learning deficit".

The document also affirms the continuity of social and racial quota policies in higher education and the implementation of federal public tenders, as well as its expansion to other public policies. At another point, the candidate says that he will "recompose the national system for promoting scientific and technological development, via funds and public agencies such as the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development (FNDCT), CNPq and CAPES".

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The government plan of the president and candidate Jair Bolsonaro, says that “from 2023 onwards, a public policy aimed at training in all age groups must be included in the planning, including Special Education and the Education of Young and Young People”. Adults, as well as vocational technical education, higher education and research, based on technology”.

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