

EDITORS' NOTE

Dear readers,

These lines are written in a climate of great uncertainty, concurrent with efforts to oust Brazil's president, Dilma Rousseff, who was democratically elected in 2014. The prospects emerging on the near horizon are none too auspicious. Should the current administration in fact be removed, leadership of the country will pass to the hands of a cabal whose intentions have already been announced, at least in part – intentions that include steps to intensify the fiscal adjustment, thereby undermining social policies and government initiatives in vital sectors like health and education. Conversely, should President Rousseff remain in power, she will face the hard task of rebuilding consensus on a foundation of weakened political support and with the country even more divided, all while grappling with today's economic crisis.

Ideological and political loyalties aside (we will not relinquish our right as citizens to profess our beliefs), the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 is under blatant attack. The foundations supporting the democratic rule of law are being threatened, as are the social conquests endorsed in Brazil's newest charter. The country's Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde, SUS) is a significant expression of the advances written into the Constitution. Despite flaws and contextual difficulties, the SUS is the successful product of the combined efforts of social movements, progressive intellectual tendencies, and political leaders. In 2016, at the eighth National Health Conference, these sectors celebrated nearly three decades of joint work. At the first conference, attendees debated issues and voiced grievances and thus helped inform the design of the Brazilian health system as outlined in 1988. Now is an opportune moment for us to look back on that event as we endeavor to guarantee enforcement of the resultant agendas and objectives and to preserve advances.

We would be remiss if we did not register here our concern over the fate of health in Brazil if the proposals contained in the document "A bridge to the future" are realized. Released in late 2015 by Vice President Michel Temer's party – the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) –, "A bridge to the future" suggests that the country's would-be future leaders intend to exempt themselves from compliance with the mandatory health sector investments stipulated in the Constitution. In detailing its plans for social welfare and education, the letter leaves clear its faith in neoliberal ideals. We are well aware of the consequences that this approach has had on the health sector – as evidenced, for example, in the historical literature on our recent past.

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Any future blows to Brazil's already ailing primary healthcare structures and public health campaigns may exacerbate our current public state of disaster, engendered by a threefold epidemic – dengue, chikungunya, and zika, all spread by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito – and by the threat presented by H1N1 flu. Well-oiled structures must be put in place to address these public health crises in the short and medium run, and this means making investments, streamlining bureaucracy, and getting political sectors to work together with civil society.

A few days ago, the southern writer Luís Fernando Veríssimo depicted History with a capital “H” – as a “wise and blasé” little old lady, whose outlook is born from having long witnessed humanity's unending planetary drama. Her life has seen a succession of extraordinary, unprecedented events, and yet we overlook her role as a trove of experience and a light that can illuminate the present and inspire projects for the future.

Without this woman's perspective, experience, and wisdom, we can do nothing but register the angst and uncertainty of a troubled present. Yet our solace is that we can still serve her by assigning her a rightful place in the pages of this journal by engaging in critical analysis, thoughtful deliberation rather than off-the-cuff opinion, and prolonged research – research that does not respond to the immediacies of the political world but that contributes to understanding, reformulating, and changing this world.

It is from this perspective that we present the latest issue of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, a journal that has from its outset held true to the mission of stimulating the analysis of medicine, public health, and the life sciences from the viewpoint of history and within the framework of these fields' complex relations with politics, economics, and culture. The current issue features a dossier on the experience of international cooperation between Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti, which is one chapter in interactions among countries of the so-called Global South in the health field.

The issue also presents articles translated into English for the first time using Wellcome Trust funds. The support of the Wellcome Trust fosters the journal's project of internationalization. Moreover, at a moment when Brazil's public institutions and their periodicals are in the tight grip of a financial squeeze, it is also greatly heartening to receive this monetary assistance.

Trusting in a better future, when democratic institutions are respected, when tolerance prevails among those who have conflicting opinions, and when the right to health and life is honored – values widely embraced as both products and enforcers of our social universe – we hope you will enjoy our newest issue.

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