

## GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE\*

### Cuts to Argentine science

The Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Técnica (National Board for Science and Technology, known as Conicet) was created in 1958 on the initiative of Argentina's second Nobel prize winner, physiologist Bernardo Houssay. Its fundamental role is to promote scientific research through state funding. It supports projects in all scientific disciplines, using a selection system that is exhaustive and rigorous.

There are two basic types of funding support: for doctoral and postdoctoral training and via appointment to staff positions within the scientific system. After obtaining a PhD and appropriate academic credentials, as measured by talks at conferences, papers published in scientific journals, human resources training, and participation in collective research projects, one can apply for a position as a career researcher. Both types, whether doctoral and postdoctoral training or by appointment into the system, require extremely rigorous and objective evaluation. Committees of experts "recommend or do not recommend" the appointment of staff scientists based on the relevance of the research proposals and the candidates' record.

The results announced in mid-December 2015 stated that the number of new staff scientists would drop from 943 in 2015 to around 400 in this year's contest. In other words, 60% fewer people would be appointed as career researchers. This represents a break from the existing process which, despite various hurdles, has been undergoing modifications for the last 15 years. With this new announcement, 508 researchers who underwent a rigorous and exhaustive selection process and were "recommended" for staff positions will not become career scientists due to the savage budget cuts implemented by the Mauricio Macri administration. These measures do not match President Macri's promises during the presidential campaign, when he supported continuing President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's scientific policy. This shift mobilized large sectors of society who called for the measure to be reviewed. On December

---

\* Science editor's note Marcos Cueto and André Felipe Cândido da Silva: Generally speaking, scientific editors normally write the introductory letter of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*. For this edition, we have invited an associate editor of this journal, Karina Ramacciotti (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Conicet), to discuss the attacks against science by the authorities in her country and explain how the scientific communities of Brazil and the rest of the world are being targeted by anti-scientific forces. These attacks run counter to the best interests of the societies, knowledge, and culture of our countries. We should not forget: it is precisely because we are developing countries that we most need science and that scientific research must be done in all areas of knowledge. We offer up this space for some timely reflections about the situation in Argentina provided especially for our journal.

19, 2016, a complaint was filed in Buenos Aires at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation. Some of the following types of pressure tactics were used: the building was occupied, streets were cut off, statements of support were read aloud and car horns were sounded. Protest and solidarity demonstrations were replicated in different cities, creating a great experience of mobilization of the scientific community.

As the protests were taking place, on social networks (especially Twitter) a vicious smear campaign was waged against Conicet researchers: social sciences were the area most targeted. Anonymous users took data from Conicet researchers' published resumés and trivialized and simplified their research topics in an attempt to rally support among unsuspecting readers and at the same time promote the idea that investing in social sciences is an "expense" and not an "investment" in the future of the country. This attack, rare in a democracy, generated even more protests in Argentina and also world-wide. Supporters stressed Conicet's prestige in terms of both national and international science and the quality of the institution's members, deploring the attacks to which they were subjected and the delay in appointing people who had been "recommended" but cannot be hired because of the decision to cut budget allocations for promoting Argentina science.

On December 23, 2016, after intense negotiations, an agreement between the affected parties was signed. It establishes that the 508 researchers approved at every stage for appointment as career scientists at Conicet but excluded by the budget cuts would be offered an "extraordinary" grant for one year. This compromise agreement will go into effect on April 1, 2017, but it leads to more uncertainty than certainty in terms of its implementation. No agreement was reached about what will happen to the researchers who begin a career as research scientists and whose "extraordinary grant" runs out after one year. The budget cuts also affect the purchase of supplies and the acquisition of adequate technology for maintaining and increasing the capacity for innovation.

In this fraught context, the conflict remains ongoing. The scientific community is alert and mobilized to support the most important scientific body in Argentina and to defend the state's role in supporting and expanding science.

*Karina Inés Ramacciotti*