

Merits and Demerits



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By Guillermo Alvarado

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is once again at the center of a sharp controversy, this time with a part of the scientific community that reacted with justified anger against a new arbitrariness of the president, usually at odds with the world of ideas and thought.

As every year, the list of those chosen to receive the National Order of Scientific Merit, an important award granted by the State to reward the most lucid and brilliant minds in this field, was disclosed at the South American Giant.

The names are chosen by prestigious institutions and then sent ex officio for approval to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Education, Science and Technology.

On this occasion, however, when everything was ready, Bolsonaro issued a surprising decree excluding two names among those selected, Marcus Vinícius Guimaraes Lacerda and Adele Schwartz Benzaken, both from the renowned research center Oswaldo Cruz Foundation.

This is a vulgar act of vengeance, a crude revenge unbecoming of a ruler, or of anyone with an ounce of common sense, decency or dignity.

It turns out that Guimaraes Lacerda was one of the first in the world to demonstrate that chloroquine has no efficacy in the treatment of Covid-19, thus refuting one of the arguments of the Brazilian president, who has declared himself in favor of this product.

Dr. Schwartz Benzaken, an AIDS specialist, published a primer to provide guidance to the trans and homosexual community, which earned her the hatred of Bolsonaro, a self-confessed homophobe.

This absurd retaliation against two prominent academics provoked 21 of the awardees to issue a public letter, where they renounce the distinction and criticize the open hostility of the president towards the scientific sector.

They point out his denialist policy regarding the pandemic, as well as the cuts to the budget allocated to science and technology, of which only 38 percent was released this year and will be reduced to less than half by 2022.

They state flatly that "the tribute offered by a government that not only ignores science, but also actively boycotts the recommendations of epidemiology and collective health is not consistent with our scientific trajectories."

It is a lesson in ethics that Jair Bolsonaro will undoubtedly be unable to understand, as a good practitioner he is of that concept that states. "if reality does not agree with my ideas, so much the worse for it".

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