

THE PLACE FOR POPULAR WISDOM

A process of vindication of aboriginal nations, or of what remains of them, of their customs and traditions, uses and wisdom is taking place in several countries of our region. The inspiration originates, on the one hand, from conservationist ideas, both of the human as of the natural world and its products that are a potential source for wellbeing and, on the other hand, from the populist political ideology, by the way, greatly abused amongst us.

Currently, an intense polemic has developed, generated by the elaboration, though not yet promulgation nor enactment, of a new law for the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research, known as IVIC for its Spanish acronym, to which *Interciencia* has been closely connected since its initial days. The law, obviously motivated by the intention of the governing groups of controlling in an absolute manner all the scenarios and activities that take place in Venezuela, is being justified mainly on two grounds. One is the alleged elitism that pervades the institution and its activities, and the other is the imminent need, according to those that have conceived the project for the new law, of incorporating the popular wisdoms, its creators and practitioners in the research process.

Arguments go back and forth, and will continue to do so, attempting to justify or to refute the epithet of elitism. What is certain is that in all activities of academic nature it is an ensemble of intellectuals, call it elite or whatever you want, who motorize progress in any field of knowledge or its applications.

In any event, the way to fight elitism in the sciences and scientific and technological research is not by destroying working institutions, but by providing the population with more and better education so that more and more members of any community have effective access to higher education and advanced training. By creating more and better, well supplied institutions, where more and more researchers can

develop their creative mission. By assessing the quality and merits of the product, and stimulating and supporting those who are able to fulfil the expected objectives. In one word, by giving the opportunity to effectively participate in the creation, diffusion and benefits of knowledge.

Whoever is able to articulate words can express an opinion about an opera, and if he has a good voice and sings perhaps he might be able to hum or sing part, or perhaps even the whole aria of *La donna e mobile*. However, by no means will this make him part of the cast for a representation of Rigoletto. There are numerous fields of man's endeavor where it is possible to tackle successfully the processes without a particular schooling, but there are other fields where this is required. Such is the case of scientific research. Governments and society at large should safeguard that their countries have the possibility to advance in the latter.

Popular participation in music is not by performing on the stage. Popular participation in politics is not at the National Congresses or Assemblies. The popular participation in science is not as researchers. The participation of the whole of society in science has to be something real and tangible that takes place at all levels and in all fields, but always in its appropriate place and at the level and in the setting that corresponds.

For information and dissemination of research results to be effective the existence of adequate information and diffusion channels is required, a good specialized press and quality scientific journals. But, above all, it requires structuring and implementing a good educational system, massive, efficient and of good quality that would allow citizens to reach the possibility of knowing how to read and understand.

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