

THE ALTERNATIVE AS SUPPORT TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN VENEZUELA

For many years the authorities of the Venezuelan Science and Technology sector have recognized the lifelong effort in research through the awarding of a National Science Prize, which rotates every few years among the different academic disciplines. One of them has been the social sciences. In parallel, the State also recognizes the punctual effort of Venezuelan researchers by granting prizes to the best papers published during the year in the main areas of intellectual work.

Last year, the National Government, through the Ministry of the Popular Power of Science and Technology, declared as deserted the Annual Prize to the Best Scientific Paper in the area of the Social Sciences, just as had happened the previous year. In a past *Interciencia* editorial (Vol. 33 N° 4: 243) attention was drawn to the situation in 2007, indicating that for several decades this prize had represented a recognition and stimulus to the activity of Venezuelan social scientists and that declaring it as 'deserted' was astonishing.

Venezuela counts with 6038 researchers certified in its Researcher Promotion Program (PPI) and 2107 of them are professionals accredited in the area of the Social Sciences. This is to say that over a third of the country's scientific force, 35%, is dedicated to carry out research on social problems, both in public and private universities, together with colleagues in official research institutions. Nevertheless, social sciences are held in low esteem amongst us. For example, the Polar Foundation does not take into account the social sciences for the concession of its prestigious award, but considers only Biology, Mathematics, Physics or Chemistry.

By not recognizing the existence or value of research in the social sciences in Venezuela, a contradiction at the Government level is revealed since, having tried to turn the social into the great paradigm of the national transformation and development, the authorities negate and reject a crucial component for the success of its political

discourse, as should be pertinent and high quality research in the social sciences.

In order to overcome the omission represented by the fact that the Venezuelan Government has not recognized for two successive years the punctual work of its researchers in the social sciences, a group of members of its scientific community has organized the award of an Alternative Prize to the Best Scientific Work in the Area of the Social Sciences in an edition corresponding to the year 2008 and has proceeded to convoke it as an academic, independent and alternative award. The purpose of this prize is to recognize the results of a research work in the field of the Social Sciences which, in the opinion of a qualifying jury would be considered of exceptional significance in regard to its originality, depth and transcendence. To this end, works published (or accepted) in a specialized journal or book, national or foreign, duly subjected to a refereeing process and published in any of the three years preceding 2008, inclusive, will be evaluated. The seven social scientists that constitute the qualifying jury, many of them who have already been awarded prizes and belong to different universities and academic areas, will be assisted in the evaluation process by the Executive Secretariat of the Caracas Chapter of the Venezuelan Association for the Advancement of Science (AsoVAC).

The Alternative Prize to the Best Paper in the Social Sciences will be granted under the same rules as the Annual Prize that the Ministry for Science and Technology should have awarded, with the purpose of showing the country and the international academic community that Venezuelans do carry out research of quality and transcendence in social sciences, a reason for their work being known and recognized. The award shall be bestowed in a formal academic session of the highest standing in June 2009, and it is expected that during the award ceremony the author of the chosen work give a lecture about his or her research. The Prize, being symbolic, carries no monetary compensation.

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