

Letter from the director

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During the electoral debate, over the recent months, the question of national education has again been raised. And from our vantage point we welcome this debate. Unfortunately, public policy debates in Colombia all suffer from epileptic seizures, in the sense that over the years they sleep peacefully without anyone to care for them and suddenly they wake up and effervesce.

And one of the most dramatic examples is, precisely, that of education. Very early in this administration it was stated that the reform of Law 30 of 1992 could not wait. And indeed a bill of reform was sent to the Congress, which, over rejection by a group of university students, was removed from the Chamber of Representatives by the express order of Mr. President. And the issue, at least in the public eye, fell asleep until today.

The lack of a State policy regarding primary and secondary education has been a disaster for Colombia. The disappearance of the teaching of social subjects, automatic promotion, the part-time school, came gradually to erase everything previously done with the teaching of history, civic education, geography, religion. And of full-time school, morning and afternoon, and of frequent tests for assessing the student progress nothing remains. Today some of these errors have been amended, but the damage caused in the meantime remained forever.

Clearly, a comprehensive reform of education in Colombia is needed: pre-primary, primary, secondary and university. And for that, obviously, big budgets are needed, but this, being basic, is not paramount. Some isolated voices have been heard about the importance of giving status to the profession of teaching and make teachers and professors the professionals of greatest relevance in society: what admirable illusion! Ignoring all the union culture that over the years has been created in the country, where any reform for the better is analyzed by the unions under scrutiny of union wage claims makes almost impossible the good wishes of those voices. And to replace in universities politics and disorder by science will also take decades.

Meanwhile the levels of education in Colombia will remain static or quasi-static and international tests will not be adapted to our standards.

It is certainly necessary to start somewhere. The idea of nurturing the students, not only for them to succeed academically, is reasonable, because first of all we need normal persons so they can

perform and get trained in order to assist in the improvement of educational and employment levels. The idea of an extended school day at least removes the students from laziness and vice and promises a better training of our youth.

The reform should be integral; to perform it by bits does not seem to be convenient.