

Letter from the director

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With our claims in the latest edition of the journal *Civilizar*, unfortunately we happened to be prophets, as it means scanning the future. With the paraphrase of the statement of Miguel de Cervantes in his immortal *Don Quixote* “con Fecode topamos, Sancho”, (with Fecode we stumbled, Sancho), we summarized what actually happened six months later: a strike that was traumatizing for children, for mobility in Bogota and for many cities in the country. And traumatizing too for the national treasury: we are not to remind the anguish of the treasury, of the finance minister and of the president, due to the illness that overtook him over the Dutch disease in which we were immersed. The imbalance of the budget is monumental in general terms, even if very exact figures were not released.

But the arrangement, despite the loosening of government budget, left many doubts sown. Apparently those who obtained huge profits were the Fecode top people, because the reaction of the rank and file teachers was immediate. More serious still; one might think that the problem of wage adjustment was not so prickly, since to step down from 28% to 12% is very significant. And it must not be said that Fecode gave up its aspirations for the budgetary limits of the country, which would be a rational consideration, in which unions do not exercise too much very often.

Something different must be for Fecode, something major, very easy to identify: the evaluation tests of teaching methods and course content. From the beginning the minister of education reported peremptorily that there was no discussion possible in this area. And she is right: If by 2025, according to the presidential statement, this will be the most educated country in South America, the quality of teachers must have a degree of excellence that so far we do not know. And there is no excellence without evaluation.

In the field of private education, if a teacher is warned of low quality in teaching and no adequate corrective is put by him/her, their stay on campus, whether in primary, secondary and even university education, is not assured for long. And this fact allows private education to usually have outstanding levels of quality. The status of official teachers is very different, not only because they belong to the union (and even if they do not belong to it), their detachment from the campus for quality is almost impossible; but also salaries and promotions are linked to the evaluation. And this was the turning point of the strike that lasted until May. And what seemed a definite and invariable position of the minister, also collapsed.

First, evaluation can have no effect of punishment for those who do not pass the exams. Second, because, as we understand, the assessment will not be carried out by external peers, but there will

be a “classroom assessment,” something rather confusing to understand. And third, because, given this system , it will be very difficult for a teacher not to succeed in the assessment, the rise in the educational scale being automatic, regardless of the true improvement in knowledge and other skills of the educator and, even more, assuming a budgetary burden, since the rise is linked to remuneration. It is not a little problem that the national government got by the need and urgency to dissolve a strike that started and became seriously unceremoniously towards the government, parents and learners.

Because, at the bottom, the meaning of this union victory, is the stagnation in the quality levels of teachers and of courses in the excellence of formal education in Colombia. And so, the promised land of being “the most educated country,” not only will last forty years , as happened to the Israelites in Moses’ time, but Santos will also die of old age without having reached the promised land marked by his prophetic finger.