

“Stay, MCTI”, and Ulisses Guimarães

The recent extinction of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MCTI, in Portuguese), or rather its fusion with the Ministry of Communications, is reminiscent of another moment in our political history when a similar fusion took place.

The Ministry of Science and Technology (MCT, in Portuguese) was created in 1985 as a result of an intense mobilization by the scientific community, the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC, in Portuguese), Physics, Anthropology, Computer Sciences and other Scientific Societies. A mobilization that touched Tancredo Neves and Ulisses Guimarães.

The Ministry, initially headed by Renato Ascher, a politician with close ties to Ulisses, was instrumental in creating the National Science and Technology System and in including guidelines in the Constitution-drafting process for a State Science and Technology policy. The Science and Technology chapter of the Constitution establishes that the State must support basic scientific research and that states may direct part of their revenue toward funding Science and Technology through Funding Agencies.

The 1988 *Constitution*, supported by the movement that had brought down the dictatorship, also establishes the bases for progressive social policies that promote development in other areas besides Science and Technology, such as health, education, environment, human rights, policies on indigenous peoples.

Even before the Constitution was enacted, on October 5, 1988, however, conservative forces started mobilizing in order to revoke or sterilize important guidelines it formalized. Ulisses leaves the Sarney administration in late July, 1988, even before October.

Without Ulisses's participation in government, Sarney extinguishes the MCT in January, 1989 (or rather, fuses it with the Ministry for Industrial Development) and hands it over to Roberto Cardoso Alves, a sugar mill owner. In late 1989, during the last month of his administration, Sarney recreates the Ministry.

Ulisses is forgotten during the 1989 Presidential election. Elites and television networks (the same ones as today) invent Fernando Collor in order to promote the first revisions to the accomplishments of 1988. Collor creates a Science and Technology Department connected to the President's Office.

The Ministry and the Science and Technology policy are reassembled under the Itamar Franco administration. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Lula and Dilma Rousseff more or less determinedly preserve Science and Technology policies and the 1988 *Constitution's* advances, but the pressure for revising important chapters is always present and intensifies over the last years of the Dilma administration. In late 2015, among proposed constitutional amendments, was one that sought to end the State's duty to promote basic research!

A “soft” coup organized by elites, newspapers and television networks, similar to the mobilization that elected Collor, removes Dilma from the Presidency. As interim acting President, the Vice-President reforms Government guidelines for social, health, human rights and indigenous policies established in Ulisses's Citizen Constitution. The Ministry of Science and Technology is once again extinguished. It is an attempt to decapitate a symbol.

As in 1989 and the Collor years, there are those in the Science and Technology who root for the current interim government's reforms, just as there were those who cheered on Sarney in 1989 and Collor in 1990.

Scientists have long faced the dilemma of on which side to position themselves politically: to pursue science in order to "relieve human fatigue" or to serve the economic-political power. To promote social justice, income distribution or the achievements of science, or to contribute to the accumulation of wealth and the concentration of power and knowledge by the elites? To stand alongside social movements and their democratic demands or to stand with authoritarian orders and progress?

The 1988 *Constitution* signaled one direction, the 2016 signals another, its opposite. "Stay, MCTI" is more than a motto, it symbolizes an ethical imperative for scientists and citizens, it is also a tribute to Ulisses Guimarães.

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