

The Arrival of Cuban Doctors Is Revealing the Cruel Face of Brazil's Medical Class

Written by Luciano Martins Costa
Monday, 26 August 2013 14:05



Brazil's newspapers were surprised by the Brazilian government's decision to import 4000 doctors from Cuba to fill critical positions in places where there is no public or private health care. The first 400 should arrive next week and will be sent to cities or neighborhoods for which Brazilian or foreign doctors didn't show any interest in the first phase of the More Doctors program enrollment.

Eighty four percent of the those places are in the North and Northeast of the country. The media tells us that, 3,511 municipalities enrolled in the program, showing an offer of 15,460 jobs. Only 15% of this total had been filled by August 21.

Each physician hired will cost the government 10,000 reais (US\$ 4,200) in monthly wages, plus the costs of moving and payment of housing and food.

The deal for the hiring of Cuban doctors was made by the Brazilian government through the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), which has an agreement with the governments of several countries, including Cuba, to face emergencies and critical shortage.

Eighty four percent of the professionals who come from Cuba have over 16 years of experience, 30% are post-graduates, many worked in countries where Portuguese is spoken mainly in Africa and all are experts in family health.

Still, leaders of medical institutions in Brazil have been making statements condemning the initiative. Representatives of the Federal Council of Medicine and the Brazilian Medical Association criticize the agreement signed with PAHO and say that the program is just an electoral trick.

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One of these leaders even claimed that the contract to bring Cuban doctors has all the "attributes of slave labor." In an odd outburst, the president of the Federal Council of Medicine told that the government's initiative "can cause a genocide".

This goes to show that a medical degree, a successful career and access to an important post as professional leader do not ensure clarity of reasoning and intellectual honesty. Managers of the leading medical institutions in the country can quickly devolve into an irrational and prejudiced speech when corporate interests speak louder than the supposedly social function inherent to their activity.

Pride and Prejudice

But there is much more behind this discussion. In social networks and message boards each new government gesture attempting to address the shortage of doctors outside major centers, brings extreme reactions as the one by the President of the Federal Council of Medicine.

In the opinion of some of his followers, the Brazilian government is not only "promoting genocide", but articulating an army of Cubans to take communism to the remote corners of Brazil, where citizens are supposedly more gullible and therefore more vulnerable to ideological preaching.

A transversal reading of such comments shows the level of stupidity that political radicalism can cause even among individuals whose level of formal education would presume some rationality.

By attacking the Brazilian program, these entities directly hit one of the most successful projects of the UN, which, through its health entities, provides assistance in remote places around the world, helping to reduce the damage of conflicts and natural disasters.

The press has to fulfill, at least formally, its role in hearing the various sides of an issue. This is the justification newspapers give to present their readers with outbursts above. Journalists, however, have also an obligation of offering enlightenment in cases in which the debate becomes unreasonable.

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One alternative would be to show the work done by physicians engaged in such programs worldwide. But the press only sees the actions of entities such as Doctors without Borders, and seems to ignore the UN humanitarian missions.

Perhaps this vision is still a residue of prejudice against behavior that the press used to call third-world policies. On the other hand, the corporative reactions of the Brazilian doctors show that the country formed a generation of professionals who lack the most basic social awareness.

The lack of civic education does not spare those born into privilege or those who are successful. They certainly are proud of their careers, and the debates brought about by medical organizations on social networks show how one can go from pride to prejudice in a few characters.