

A better **welfare** state in the Republic

In December, the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), done by the OECD in 2015, were made public. The tests are taken every three years by 15-year-old pupils near the end of compulsory education in most developed countries and regions of the world and are the top global survey in education. The latest results left the Catalan education system in a pretty good place: in the three assessed skills—mathematics, science and reading—the average performance of Catalan pupils beat Spain, the EU and the OECD for the first time, with good progress in maths and science skills compared to 2012. Among the group of 72 countries assessed Catalonia ranked between the 19th and 20th positions. The results are acceptable, although there is much room for improvement. As for another component of the welfare state, the healthcare system, Catalonia in some ways is an international benchmark of quality.

However, it must be said that if the Catalan education system works well it is especially due to the involvement of teachers, families and pupils, since in recent years it has suffered budget cuts that have led to

the reduction of staff and the elimination of educational projects. Similarly, the cuts have also affected the Catalan healthcare system in recent years. It should be noted that it was not only a consequence of the economic crisis, as a leading agent of Spain acknowledged: “We have destroyed their healthcare system”, with the aim of attacking the welfare state and social cohesion in order to break the independence movement. If they fail in their attempt to harm public health, it is due to the dedication and effort of thousands of professionals.

Future prospects

The management of education and healthcare in Catalonia is the reserve of the Catalan government. But the vast majority of the resources to fund these social services are transferred by Spain’s central government under an unfair financing system. So, although Catalonia is one of the first among regions in terms of taxes paid per head, it ranks in the last positions for received resources per capita in real terms. So, there is now relatively less money to pay for the education and healthcare of the citizens of Catalonia.

And what are the prospects if we continue in Spain? Well, clearly worse. Indeed, the economic and political inefficiencies are structural to the Spanish state. Abuse of Catalonia through the funding system has been made by Spanish governments of all stripes. Spanish general government debt has reached an unsustainable level of more than 100% of gross domestic product and the citizens of Catalonia pay a 19.5% of it with our taxes, more than we receive in services. In addition, the Spanish Constitutional Court has struck down many laws of from the Catalan parliament intended to improve the welfare state, and Catalan government initiatives to increase their meagre income with new taxes in order to finance the welfare state.

Thus, the only way to maintain and improve the welfare state in Catalonia is a Republic. Indeed, with independence from Spain and the end of the fiscal plundering (over 16 billion euros on average every year), the Catalan government will have more resources for the improvement of the welfare state. And it will in particular be able to legislate freely according to the specific needs of the citizens of Catalonia.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

TERRY PARRIS Writer

Looking for small **miracles** in 2017

Thomas Tusser, the poet, said in the 16th century: ‘At Christmas play, and make good cheer,/ For Christmas comes but once a year.’

But Tusser was English and here we ‘play and have good cheer’ from before Christmas until after ‘The Three Kings’. In fact, I’ve only just finished the last celebration!

So February can bring a sense of relaxation, of “Well, all that was lovely, but now it’s done.” But does routine signify boredom? Have we taken nothing new from Ja-

nuary and the promise of a New Year?

With any luck (or wisdom) we have. We’ve examined our everyday life. Is it fulfilling? How about the children? Is our family life as we’d like it to be? Can we effect changes in both? And we adults? Do we consider our job to be a ‘daily grind’? Should we find ways to inject enthusiasm into our work? What are we doing to help others, outside the family? The refugees, for example? There are pockets of refugees in some towns, for example in Vic and in

Berga. Might we volunteer to give them Catalan conversation classes? Offer to show them around, to get an idea of where in the world they are. Invite people into our homes, too. But, is it enough?

And so February can about regeneration and action. Let us listen to ourselves. Breathe deeply and listen! Our wishes can come true. Jesus said ‘if your eye be single, your whole body will be full of light’. Small miracles are possible. In 2017, we should let our inner light shine!

VERBA DOCENT, EXEMPLA TRAHUNT NEIL STOKES nstokes@cataloniatoday.cat



“It would be better for all of them if they were to look for this offered hand instead of embracing radicalism and allowing their hands to be tied by extremism” Mariano Rajoy, Spanish prime minister

Rajoy’s metaphor is a good one, if a little overdone. But you get the feeling that if Catalan politicians were to take up his offer, he would try that old trick of pulling his hand away at the last second, or perhaps he would be palming the political equivalent of a hand buzzer.