

## A LESSON ON NATIONALISM AND POLITICS

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**Evidently we need criticisms, but not at the cost of demoralizing what we have already achieved.**

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in an interview to the newspaper *Valor Econômico*, gave a lesson on nationalism and on what politics means in a democratic society. Regarding the first issue, Lula d himself a nationalist, demanded that entrepreneurs also be nationalist, and said that he has long been asking Vale do Rio Doce to build iron and steel plants in Brazil rather than just exporting iron ore. His very words: "I have systematically asked Vale to build iron and steel plants in the country. Everyone knows what Vale represents to Brazil. It is an extraordinary corporation, but it cannot afford to export only iron ore... Entrepreneurs should be as Brazilian and as nationalist as me!" I would add, and more emphatically, that economists should also be as patriotic or nationalist as the president demands.

The policy of not exporting primary goods, but only manufactured goods with higher value-added per capita, is as old as the hills. The great English mercantilist kings, at the end of the fifteenth century (sic), already adopted the industrial policy of prohibiting raw wool exports in order to export only the woollen fabric. Recently, the Chinese imposed a tax on steel exports because they want to export the finished goods produced with steel. This way, besides creating jobs, they create jobs with higher technological content, which pay higher wages, and therefore accelerate their economic development. Meanwhile, our economists tell us that the problem should be left to the market. Consequently, even when we export steel, we mainly export raw steel, and we agree to export soybeans to the Chinese who do not want to buy soybean oil!

And the lesson on politics? First of all, in several moments Lula showed respect for Fernando Henrique, Marina Silva and José Serra. Second, he opportunely defended the Brazilian Congress: "The Congress is the only institution judged collectively. But if there was no session you say: 'A lazy representative who doesn't work'. And you never mention the representatives who were there, on duty, the whole time. When I was a member of the Constitutional Congress, I was crazy because I worked until two, three in the morning... If you don't like politics, if you think that every politician is a thief, that he is a good-for-nothing, don't renounce politics. Go into politics because maybe the perfect thing you want is inside you."

The president is absolutely right. Politics is very important, it affects our lives, and should, therefore, be honored and adopted as a profession by the the best among us. Brazil dramatically needs good politicians, and, fortunately, it has a good number of them. Men and women endowed with public spirit, with commitment to their nation, who defend their legitimate interests, but, at the same time, also defend Brazilian interests. And, yet, when we read the newspapers, when we talk with our friends, it seems that no one is decent. This is definitely not true. It is true that our country doesn't have a State or politics such as those existing in Scandinavian countries, but it is also true that, taking into account Brazilian degree of economic and cultural development, we have a level of State organization, of quality of institutions, and of commitment of many politicians to citizenship and the public good that I regard as above average. Evidently we need criticisms, but not at the cost of demoralizing what we have already achieved.