

The Olympics of a social democracy

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Folha de S. Paulo, July 31, 2012

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The Olympics are a universal sports and cultural manifestation, but I do not remember having ever watched such a nationalist, contemporary and politically progressive opening show. During two hours we saw the British celebrate in a good-humored way their major economic, scientific, cultural and social feats. There it was the old Albion, both the agricultural and pastoral one and the Industrial Revolution one, of modern science and Internet discovery, there it was the United Kingdom of Queen Elisabeth II and Shakespeare, the Great Britain of rock, pop culture and the Beatles, of James Bond and Lewis Carroll's Alice, of children's stories and Harry Potter, of the British cinema, of "Chariots of Fire" and Mr. Bean. And, yes, there it was a multicultural society and its Welfare State represented by the National Health Service. And no sign of the British power, of its City and its bombs.

The show was not as beautiful or as impressive as the Chinese one, but it was democratic and progressive. It was a political show. And this is why I adopt it as the subject of this article. It was the show of a democratic society that believes and sees the progress taking place. Something that is difficult in the current world, in a world that experiences the profound hangover of the 30 Neoliberal Years – the Long Recession triggered by the 2008 global financial crisis.

During 30 years the Welfare State faced a crisis, was threatened by a political coalition of rent-seekers, financiers and neoliberal economists who used to tell us, peremptorily and definitely, that in the era of globalization there was no longer room for this kind of State. That the "rational" State was the liberal State, the minimum State, a State whose rules would be limited to guarantee property, contracts and public morality; that would defend the rich, therefore, since it was not concerned with the fraud or deception in which the neoliberal years abounded.

However, as an incurable optimist, I have always said that the Welfare State would resist the neoliberal attack, because this attack took place in democracies, where the people's will counts – a will that definitely favors the large universal social services that characterizes this kind of State. We are living in the time of social democracy, and the reactionary attempt to return to the nineteenth century – the time of the liberal State – makes no sense and is not feasible.

Now, in view of the great opening show that our British friends presented, we see another confirmation of those truths. Suddenly, before us, in a huge national and global celebration, appears the National Health Service (corresponding to our unified healthcare system) as the main character. As a great British achievement, and as the embodiment of good. Which it actually is. Among the fundamental rights that modern

man defined and is winning – rights to freedom, to economic welfare, to justice, to environmental protection, and to education – it is the universal right to healthcare. No right is more universal than this one, because, while a certain inequality may be justified in the others, nothing justifies inequality in healthcare. There is no reason for wealthier, more powerful, or more interested people to have better healthcare. This simple truth of social democracy was beautifully reaffirmed in the opening of the Olympics.