

# THE VIRTUAL ERA

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**Abstract:** The supposed new World Order based on U.S. hegemony lasted very few years and at the beginning of the new century, no order existed. The so called multilateralism vanished into the turmoil of a world without international scenario. The confusion spread over all aspects of society with a feeling of helpless. Globalism has not made poorness disappear, and economic crisis with its tragic human consequences have not been erased from the capitalist system. Societies are lost among a desert of contradictories tendencies under unreal promises. If a solution is not found in short period of time, putting an end to poverty, dissatisfaction, frustration and the sensation that the future will be worse than the present, human beings will have no solution but revolution.

**Keywords:** revolution, porverty, social confrontation, New Era, historical evolution, Renaissance, social values, distribution of wealth.

## **Introduction**

In the XIVth century, Western culture discovered the individuality of human beings. Since then, this idea occupied a predominant place in human thought until the XIX century when was partly replace by the concept of social classes. But from the end of the XXth century, human beings were on the way to be submerged by the masses, vanishing into a new category of beings without personality, product of a worldwide extension of an impersonal virtual system of communications, of unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences. A new time begins: the virtual era. I will concentrate my study on the European scenario, on the basis that the West has evolved on the same principles from the Renaissance to the end of the XX th., and the essential influence in other continents and cultures

## **A past without hope**

Ever since the Church invented paradise in the Middle Ages, Westerners have imagined it either in a past forever lost, the Garden of Eden, or beyond mortal life. The daily unhappiness of the medieval time caused an anguish, impossible to overcome but bearable when thinking about the proximity of the end of the world: millennialism was the long-awaited solution to all evils. The intrinsic perversity of existence was a concept that the Church had imposed: the Devil ruled the world

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and the fear of Hell was an essential part of the thought: "*Hell, the punitive afterlife, of the Christian religion, is arguably the most powerful and persuasive construct of the human imagination in the Western tradition*" (Bruce, 2018, xiii). But for greater enjoyment of the chosen "*the beatitude of the saints may please them more, and that they may render better thanksgiving to God, they are given to owe perfectly the sufferings of the ungodly*" (Thomas Aquinas, 2007, question 94).

The unavoidable suffering in an existence of eternal salvation or damnation, even for minor faults, developed the idea, at the end of the twelfth century, of an intermediate place, the Purgatory, which would allow souls, which weren't too sinful, to save themselves from eternal damnation (Le Goff, 1981).

This was the first step to change the view of existence on earth. Fear, as a way of understanding life, was yielding from the XIV century to a different approach discarding the medieval conception of the sinful, guilty, unworthy being. The consideration that one own epoch itself is of decadence is not a new idea since all civilisations of the Middle East, Greece and Rome, have always considered their own time as a decadent one. From India to Rome, the world had entered the worst moment of all history. But as it was a cosmic vision, it did not affect daily life that could be very pleasant.

So, from the XIVth. century, pessimism was replaced by an optimistic idea about man: someone worthy of attention, king of creation, and instead of condemnation in an life of undeserved suffering, he had to love life and what it offered to him. The human being became the centre of his own existence through the improvement of his spiritual life: "*Humanism aims less at the conceptual elaboration of a world system than at the intellectual and ethical fulfilment of man*" (Margolín 2007).

The basis of this new attitude was the rediscovery of the Ancient world, Rome and, above all, Greece: "*This anthropocentric inclination of the Attic spirit is what gives rise to the birth of humanity... in the knowledge of the true essential human form. Particularly significant, for the first time, women appear as a representative of the human with equal dignity alongside men.*" (W. Jaeger, 1974, 258). M. King goes even further and considers that "*the Man of the Renaissance is born from the woman of the Renaissance*" (King. 2000, 289). The new epoch began around 1330 with the search for ancient manuscripts which Petrarch considered of the most cultural importance, and in the winter of 1417: "*the rediscovery of nature by Poggio Bracciolini, named the Pogge,... has the advantage of resonating with the term which designates the cultural upheaval at the origins of modern life and thought: a rebirth of Antiquity*" (Greenblatt, 2020, 21).

### **Man believes in himself and in life**

According to John Bury, the new belief was impossible without first liberating oneself from the religious sense that permeated the medieval mentality: "*for the hope of an ultimate happy state on this planet to be enjoyed by future*

*generations... has replaced, as a social power, the hope of felicity in another world” (Bury, 1920, p. viii).* The belief of human beings in themselves and in what he could achieve in this life, allowed little by little the notion of progress to become largely the central thought for Westerners, and identifying it with happiness.

According to the new spirit, everything could be analysed, discussed (Machiavelli 2020) and, in political theory and practice, the moral principles taught by the Catholic Church were not disregarded, but it was considered that they could not always be applied for there were others which had priority in certain situations. Nevertheless, this radical transformation of human thought and life brought will not exclude religion and belief in God, even if an ideological dispute began with the Church of Rome, putting an end to accept without discussion what until then had been considered intangible "truths" of the Church: “*Most of them (among Christians) present the Virgin, mother of God, a little candle, in broad daylight, which is of no use to her. But how little he strives to imitate his virtues, chastity, modesty, love of divine things*” (Erasmus, 1964, 86) and thus critical writing began its journey.

The defence of faith and religion as it was in the Middle Ages, became even more unrealistic since, regarding the political aspect, the Vatican itself was at the beginning of a political practice based on the *raison d'état*, which justified the popes using their spiritual power to support their earthly claims against other princes, acting like any other power. The difference, however, was that the Church used religion as a political tool. That behaviour has continually distanced the Church from Christianity as was denounced from time to time, by secular and religious critics. For the benefit of its earthly interests, the Papacy did not hesitate to resort to lies, to falsification, as i.e., with the so-called Donation of Constantine, which the humanist Lorenzo Valla proved to be a fake (Valla, 1440). For the first time, writers dared to attack the Catholic Church using reason and material proofs to demolish Church's inventions for satisfying materialistic goals.

Precisely, the behaviour of the Papacy provoked one of the two events that, between 1492 and 1517, marked the path of the following centuries influencing definitively material and intellectual life: the publication of Martin Luther's 95 theses. If the discovery of America opened the road to colonise new lands, to imagine unsuspected richness and places (Eco, 2013) and even to think of the new continent as an oasis of paradisiacal happiness full of promises, real or imagined. Previously unimaginable discussions begin, such as those that took place in 1550-51 in the Junta de Valladolid, where, for the first time in history, two priests de las Casas and de Sepúlveda analysed if all human beings had the same rights, and what principles authorised a State to appropriate itself with foreign lands. It was the first discussion on human rights. (Dumont, 2009). The reform initiated by Martin Luther was an attempt to return Christianity to the origins, but, at the same time, it opened a spiritual path to the human being as new and immense as Christopher Columbus' geographical discovery. The significance of the Reformation in all aspects of life is difficult to exaggerate. Once Luther launched his challenge, its consequence had an unimaginable effect on an extremely corrupted Rome.

The believer of the Reformation was in total solitude, face to face with God, to whom he will speak, to whom he will blindly obey, but God will not answer, the prayers will have no other answer than silence. With Luther and Calvin, religion returns to the Old Testament, and from it takes the idea, among many others, of the chosen people who, instead of being Israel, will be the new people of the Reformation. This idea will play a very important role and serve the materialistic and political interest of reformed people: the Dutch Calvinists justified the slavery of the black people in South African in the curse of Noah to his son Canaan, because the black were his descendants: "*Cursed be Canaan, servant of servants be to your brothers*" (Gen. 9-25). Even among the reformed churches, differences are established: in his speech of September 4, 1654, before the English Parliament, Cromwell declared that only *his* church is the Chosen One. Later on, in 1870, Constantin Frantz, a leading German conservative, considered: "*The Jewish people have rejected Christ...for instead the Germans became God's Chosen People*" (Mosse, 1974, 124). That belief of being the chosen people will be the justification to all kinds of exactions and atrocities, all of them done in God's name.

For Luther nothing could be expected from Rome: "*I have in conformity with our resolve put together some few points concerning the Reformation of the Christian Estate, with the intention of placing the same before the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, in case it may please God to help His Church by means of the laity, inasmuch as the clergy, whom this task rather befitted, have become quite careless*" (Luther, 1883,17). Luther thus places his reform on a political plane.

### **The crisis of the European conscience**

In the reformed society, the community acquired the previous preponderant role of the family. Following the Old Testament, the entire community was responsible for the sin of one of its members, and following the Mosaic precepts, converted respect in law as the essential basis of relationships within the community, and the only road to God. But at the same time, the Reformed churches were dominated by a negative sense towards the world and human beings (as it was in the Middle Ages. A dialogue from Marlowe's *Faust* (1604), the moment the devil comes to visit Faust, serves as a perfect example:

Faust "*Where are you damned?*"

Mephisto "*In Hell*"

Faust "*How come it, then, that thou are out of Hell?*"

Mephisto "*Why this is Hell, nor I am out of it!*"

Therefore, this life is hell. The personal responsibility of the human being, of the prize through the success in the world, will have a decisive influence on the evolution of the West. Politically, if Luther demands fidelity and obedience to authority, quoting Saint Paul: "*Let everyone be subject to higher authorities, for*

*there is no authority that does not come from God*” (Paul, 13,1), excluding the authority that does not respect or oppose the true religion (the reformed). In the XIXth century the ultra-catholic de Maistre will defend the same idea for the Pope.

Economically, Reformation demands a life based on frugality, work, and savings, and in so doing lays the foundations for the development of capitalism. The reward for the fulfilment of the precepts of the reformed creed, of the law, for individual responsibility became material triumph in life, so the poor deserved to be poor and the rich received their reward: punishment must firmly follow the law. Thus, the Old Testament had much greater importance in the Reformation than the New Testament, and in consequence, mercy, voluntary poverty, forgiveness had no place. The expansion and sanctification of the capitalist economy will mean the definitive take-off of the West. In previous centuries, started a way of trading built around new institutions. The bill of exchange that originated in Italy in the 12th century, will become a form of payment for all commerce in Europe. In addition, money-issuing houses, whose beginnings are in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Genova, Venice, Florence etc, also contribute to the development of trade by creating the first banking institution in Genoa in 1406: the bank of San Giorgio. The Reformation refused to consider loans with interest and other commercial practices condemned by the Vatican, to be sinful, and made them in this way, the essential mechanisms for the development of the capitalist adventure. In fact, the development of the new economic mentality showed, as an example, the huge difference between the Reformed and Catholic countries. The Reformation was also the promoter of the new ideological political of the West from the sixteenth to nowadays. The traumas of the religious struggles, the openness of spirit, the freedom of thought, the discovery of new people and lands, contributed to create a plethora of thinkers, jurists, scientists, philosophers and politicians such as Vitoria, Las Casas, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, Boyle, Halley, Descartes, Pascal, Colbert or Vauban, among many others. All of them launched a challenge to the human mind, causing what Paul Hazard called the “crisis of the European conscious” at the end of the XVII th. century. This enriching and revolutionary crisis anticipated the great intellectual explosion of the eighteenth century, origin of the two major political and economic events for political and social life: the Independence of the United States and, especially, the French Revolution, whose origin was undoubtedly in the great intellectual life that ran through France from the thirties of that century (Badinter, 1999, Chartier 2000), and anticipating those events, from an economic point of view, the industrial revolution will be the other column on which the edifice of modernity will rise.

Thus, the thought of the eighteenth century was the crystallisation of the ideas that emerged in the centuries of the Renaissance, discovering the essential piece of this vast movement, the human being, because without the reflection on him and on earthly life, none of this thought could have arisen.

## A world in revolution

With the Declaration of Independence of the United States (1776) and the approval by the French National Assembly in 1789 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, came the two texts, which had special relevance for the evolution of the state until today. From then on, the revolution was naturally possible, because the American one justified the right to rebel against the legitimate sovereign and the French text because it gave a universal meaning to the rights that Man had by the mere fact of being one. The new question will be to define who is a man. The essential fact from those two revolutions will be the entry of the masses into political action. Although, the bourgeoisie in France first colligate with the "people" (the *sans culottes*), later the bourgeoisie will fight the people and thereby appropriating the Revolution and the Republic, *Republique Bourgeoise*. The dilemma from this moment remains unresolved to this day: who should govern the elite or the masses?

The bourgeoisie defined its idea of democracy imposing the census system in France, in the United Kingdom it already existed, and in the United States black people were excluded. The practically totality of the political parties and intellectuals considered, as Mme. de Stael wrote, that the people first needed a moral straightening, an education, not only from the intellectual point of view: the middle class imposed its idea of morals, of ethics, prior to any consideration of general democracy. Many intellectuals in France, England or Germany opposed to educate the people and give them political freedom. According to Pope Gregory XVI, freedom will mislead uneducated people

This mass would not have concentrated in these proportions, however, without the industrial revolution. Millions of human beings left their ancestral homes to go to depersonalised cities where they lived crowded, miserable and with no other pretence than simply not dying of hunger. The Industrial Revolution had not only economic but sociological consequences of the utmost importance: the personal relationship of the village disappeared before the imposition of the anonymity of the factory. Where only norms and laws had to be respected and followed. The living conditions of the working class were beyond any know situation until then: the morality and the religious principles that the dominating bourgeoisie and middle class wanted to impose stopped at the gates of factories and working-class neighbourhoods.

The Industrial Revolution, inextricably linked to the aristocracy and the nascent bourgeoisie, was based on the ideological principles imposed by the Protestant Reformation, which practically supposed exploited workers in factories, placing them under unimaginable living conditions. According to the Reformed morality, this was for workers' own benefit: miserable wages and strenuous hours were fully justified for humanitarian reasons because if the worker had spare time, he would spend it in the pub. Consequently, if he earned any more than what was deemed strictly necessary to survive and reproduce, and not physically exhausted the excess income and time was spent in alcohol. Then the ruling class respected its principles justifying that workers were exploited for the

good moral of the worker himself. The bourgeois taught workers that, as the biblical mandate indicated, one had to work as soon as possible. In this society, everyone has his role: in the spinning mills that R. Owen establishes in New Lanark (Scotland), considered the most advanced social experiment of the time, children must unbolt the looms, as their arms were small and slender enough to pass between the machines that could not be stopped. The fact the machines cut off the children's arms was no more than an assumable risk for the church and the bourgeois' moral. A Peruvian-French young, ruined noblewoman, Flora Tristán, grandmother of the painter Paul Gauguin, analysed in her travels through the United Kingdom and France at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the conditions of women and working life in general (*Peregrinations*, 1986). She concluded, before any other political thinker, that without a union neither women nor workers would get out of exploitation and poverty (*Union*, 1986). Time and partisan interests had taken away the attention towards this extraordinary woman, to the extent that today most contemporary feminists today do not even know whom she is. But her innovative thinking and sincere desire to improve the conditions of the working class, by raising awareness on the material and moral circumstances in which these classes lived, make her a forgotten pioneer in the struggles for the emancipation of women and the working class (Bloch-Dano 2018, Krulic. 2022)

Starting in the 1840s, the labour movement developed in England, the country in Europe with the most industrial growth. In 1848, the publication of "The Communist Manifesto" was considered a posteriori as a milestone in the creation of a conscious working class, but at the time, it went almost unnoticed. The strength of the labour movement, however, both through socialism and through anarchism, made the ruling classes in Europe to regard the proletariat as a danger (Chevalier, 2007) which reached its apogee in the Paris Commune (1871). Although neither organised nor funded by the International Association of Workers (IWA), the French authorities tried to rally the European ruling classes around their denunciation of the IWA as the greatest danger to peace and stability on the continent and the origin of the Commune. With the exception of precisely the two states in which industrialism was least developed, Spain and Russia, the other governments dissociated themselves from the Paris claims because governments have opened a new way to tackle with social movements through channels of communication and participation, of the working class political parties and associations.

### **The Crowd: intellectuals, education, democracy and the masses**

*"The mid nineteenth century, perhaps 1848, more probably 1871, is the turning point in the history of the idea of the crowd, because from that time onwards the crowd becomes central to social and political theorising"* (McClelland, 1989,3). From the second half of the nineteenth century, intellectuals

in the United Kingdom and France analysed the consequences of access of the masses to education and culture. The issue lasted until the mid-twentieth century and had two facets.

In the former, there was a near unanimity against extending education to the children of the poor classes. Nevertheless, in France, for example, the Third Republic with Jules Ferry as Minister of National Education (1871), promoted the general extension of access to schools and separate education from the religious control, even if the rupture State-Catholic Church did not take place until 1905, as a consequence of the *Dreyfus affair*. However, in France as in the United Kingdom the concern that many intellectuals have for the fate of the working class does not entail considering that it should have access to reading. This principle had nothing to do with the social origin of intellectuals. Many writers, such as HG Wells, from underprivileged backgrounds, were decidedly against publications, which could be purchased with the meagre wages of workers. In France, Balzac wrote to George Sand expressing his total opposition to general civic instruction for all children. To him, like to the British intellectuals, the instruction must be very limited and, in any case, never give access to what would be the *general culture*.

Not only intellectuals but also scientists worried about the role of the masses in society. Gradually the idea of eugenics spread as a way to channel the increase in population and above all to try to direct the intellectual and physical capacity of future generations. Thus, left-wing intellectuals such as George Bernard Shaw defended a eugenic policy and in the United States, the immigration laws that were imposed from the 1920s, had an important eugenic component. Wells dealt pessimistically with this subject in his "*The Island of Dr. Moreau*."

In the utopias that began to proliferate at the end of the XIXth century with HG Wells even if there were many pioneers from the XVI th, and the twentieth (especially A. Huxley, G. Orwell and R. Bradbury, all of them deeply indebted to E. Zamiatyn) education and culture played a major role. As an example, in "*Fahrenheit 451*", those who escaped the legal world, where books are forbidden, took refuge in a forest, dedicating themselves to memorize books in order to save culture.

However essential, as we will see below, the democratic push will in no way mean that the masses will be trusted. Marx's demand for the necessary awareness of the proletariat, the delimitation set by Lenin between the vanguard of the proletariat as the guide of the working class, and the proletariat in general, demonstrate a clear intention to guide the working class, no trust it. One wonders what the meaning of Wells' work "*The Time Machine*" has, and if the monsters that live in the subways of the world are not ultimately the working class. Orwell in "*Animal Farm*", disillusioned with communism, will describe the revolutionary ruling class as corrupt and power loving as the old bourgeoisie. The sentence written on the wall describes perfectly well his disappointment with the revolutionary ruling class, whatever it may be its ideology: "*All animals are equal,*" said the sentence written on the wall, and someone has added, "*but there are some who are more equal than others.*" Malaparte, as many other authors,



described the same corruption in Stalin's time (1999).

Either liberals or conservatives, the democratic idea was not taken literally, and they did not apply or dismantled the system to direct it in such a way as not to leave more than the basic space to the masses, which meant just to do what the leaders allowed them to do. If democracy was not in accordance with the wishes of the leaders, the "democratic decision of the people" was rectified: in France, the vote for a European constitution (May 29<sup>th</sup> 2005) obtained 56% of votes against, as well as in the Netherlands, where people also rejected it. If there had really been a democracy, these results would have been respected, but the ruling classes consider the popular will wrong, because it did not follow the will of the ruling class and the referenda were repeated getting this time the "correct" results.

Thus, the census system, where the power of the masses is totally controlled if not annulled, has its origins with the accession of the masses to the political sphere and in a certain way, it was about a logical development: in a capitalist world, it would be contradictory for those who possess, to be controlled by those who do not.

### **Social capitalism**

When the mass (still without consciousness of forming a class) claimed to have access to the polls, the great problem of democracy was raised: the State had to be governed by numbers or wealth? The dissociation of political and economic power reached its first climax after the First World War and the creation of the Soviet Union. From then on, the conflict arose between a working class eager to seize economic power from the ruling class through political or revolutionary triumph, and a ruling class trying to nullify the political power acquired by the dispossessed, through the imposition of its economic strength.

The end of the Second World War and the elevation of the URSS, to the rank of world power, treating the other great victor of the war, the United States, on an equal footing, made to capitalism in the West fear the worst. The dilemma was between giving up some political power and wealth through negotiation or opposing all change and provoking (so it was feared) a workers revolution supported by Moscow.

The miscalculation was monumental, since the URSS never had planned to go beyond the Potsdam agreements. But the ruling classes of Western democracies preferred rather than to provoke confrontation, to negotiate with a social-democracy enemy of communism and with trade unions that could be attracted to the system, even if it cost losing part of their political power and wealth. The U.S realized that the greatest danger for Europe was not the revolution, which was the consequence, but poverty and mistrust of the future of the working class. On the other hand, recalling the economic paralysis in the U.S after the W.W. I, Washington considered essential to maintain the level of production by extending a consumer society to the entire West: the solution was the Marshall Plan. Thus, it managed to maintain its economic rhythm, create a dependency on Western states towards the U.S., reduced poverty and stop any revolutionary risk. Communism

had to be stop, in the West but in Greece too and when years later Italy was about to fall under the rule of the P.C.I., Kissinger travelled to Rome to offer not only advice but also millions of dollars to support the Christian Democrats.

This social tranquillity had two consequences in the medium term. It gentrified the European social-democratic parties and neutralized the power of demands of the unions that ended up serving alternatively the interests of the ruling classes and their affiliates. So, i.e., an excess of production was solved by the producers agreeing to a strike with the unions, which asked for some improvements for the workers. The production was paralyzed, the workers were not paid and, in the end, some demands were obtained that gave the working class the feeling that they had won, at least in part, and the enterprises solved their excess of production. However, in the long term, this pseudo-corruption of the trade unions provoked a lost all credibility with the workers.

This whole scheme was exhausted at the end of the eighties: capitalism had nothing to give up now that “social-capitalism” had ended. In 1979, F. Braudel wrote: *“Surely, capitalism today has changed in size and proportions fantastically. It went to a level of bases and resource exchanges also fantastically enlarged. But, mutatis mutandis, I doubt that the nature of capitalism has changed fundamentally”* (2018, 102).

The fall of the URSS was the unexpected solution: the fear of revolution disappeared, capitalism could spread without limit and perhaps the end of a period of civilization had been reached, as Francis Fukuyama (1992) suggested very optimistically. One year later, Samuel P. Huntington envisaged a much more conflictive world in an article published in 1993 and turned into a book in 1996 “The Clash of Civilisations”. Reality leaned more on Huntington's side, not only because of the conflict with part of the Muslim world, but because capitalism itself had changed course, returning to the devastating character of the nineteenth century. This transformation to the past provoked what Gaetano Mosca had foreseen before W.W. II: *“the impoverishment of the middle class, of that portion of the bourgeoisie that lives on small savings, on moderate holdings of real estate and, especially, by its intellectual labours”*. (1939, 483). This savage capitalism could trigger a conflict between classes in a medium-term period.

Capitalism proclaimed its total victory. Communism was a heresy that had consumed itself. China, the only country that officially remained communist, launched itself in a race to bring capitalism to the country and to new goals. Through a mixture of mass production of bad quality products, which profit was invested in the West, and the continuation of the dictatorship of one party, China became a world first order economic actor, extending its power to a large part of the planet, mainly in search of natural resources, which Beijing badly needed. While the West yielded to Chinese investments, Beijing developed a military and technological power to surpass the West. The era of the scenography of democracy, of apparent democratisation, of interpreting democracy to satisfy a public whose first role had ended, was over.

## **An international scene in full chaos**

The two wars in Iraq, the invasion of Afghanistan, the crisis in Syria, North Africa, destabilised the international map completely. In 1989, most thought that a unified world would be led by the United States. Some of us thought that no State was powerful enough to govern the planet and that, based on capitalist thinking: no State would have an interest in investing efforts and wealth in areas of the world that were not profitable. After barely ten years, the world had exploded into several rival power centres, none of them claiming total domination but primacy in its own sphere of interest. The new international order was to be created in great confusion because, unlike previous moments of change in history, there was no new ideology to replace the previous one: it had simply disappeared, leaving a void.

During the bipolar era, multilateralism had its peak through the United Nations, where all states were represented, albeit in a somewhat peculiar way: Taiwan, a small island with barely 12 million inhabitants, represented P.R of China with more than 700 million. Ukraine and Belarus had their own representation despite being part of the Soviet Union. Controlled by the five great powers, the Security Council was the correction of the powers to the democratic principle represented by the General Assembly. 40 years after the San Francisco Chart, the reform was necessary but never will reach a positive result, because none of the permanent members (although from the seventies, the U.K. and France no longer had any justification to be one) will accept to resign their veto right. The really greatest ones (the United States, Russia and China) could not accept being dominated by a swarm of small States with an annual budget often did not reach the budget of an average city in any of those three States. The other two (U.K. and France) remaining in that Council was the last memory they had of their time as great powers. Multilateralism had a brief existence. Starting at the end of the XX century, it finishes at the beginning of the following one, when Russia and China considered that the West did not respect the agreements reached in the Libyan crisis. From that moment, affairs were to be decided by two or three parties, namely China, the United States and Russia. Faced with the growing international tension in which each of the 'Big Three' tested the extent to which the other two were willing to give in, the multilateral relationship disappeared as a possibility and the U.N became a "survival", a definition of relics of old past time described by E.B. Tylor. The U.N. was no more than the Hyde Park Corner of the international stage.

## **The institutionalization of fear. From the dominance of the mass to the dominance over the mass**

Since 1945, with the threat of a nuclear war, the West had lived in continuous fear to justify unimaginable expenses on arms and a new-minded imperialism, based on the principle that what is not for us is for the enemy. However, the acceptance by the USSR of the end of nuclear competition created a serious problem in the West: governments could no longer control the masses with

"fear".

AIDS was the origin of the new alarm that, obviously, was the consequence of something happening in Africa, somewhere in the jungle, where nobody could control if the information was right or not. However, it did not last long.

The terrible Islamist terrorist attacks happened in the right moment to be exploited by the established powers in order to recreate a new atmosphere of fear, which gave them the possibility of directly attacking democratic values. Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, entirely invented by the U.S. to justify an unjustifiable war of invasion of Iraq, opposed by the UN Security Council, and its extension to Afghanistan, once again mobilized the West around another fear no less imaginary than the Soviet invasion after World War II. Terrorism was the new argument to justify unprecedented violations of Human Rights: torture on CIA air planes, with the complicity of many Western governments, Guantánamo etc. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan were lost, but the US seized Iraqi oil, the real purpose of the invasion of that country. When terrorism no longer justified further democratic setbacks, a new fear, COVID-19, entered the scene, a new justification to keep fear alive and new attacks on democratic values, especially in certain countries like France. Tacking into account that the masses anti-Covid measures were creating social unrest because the enemy was inside and has no face, something different had to be created in order to keep fear alive among the masses.

The war in Ukraine came just at the right moment: a furious race for arms swept Western countries, and the money refused some months previously for social needs, now was used without any limit to buy U.S. arms, and damaging the European program of defence. All of what has been mentioned leads us to the present day in which after a period from 1945 to 1989 where the masses prevailed as an essential element of stability, the ruling classes began their reconquest of total power. Capitalist values swept the Western way of life, changing dramatically the society: good and evil were relative, when existent, because in a society of "appearance" what mattered was not moral value but being "in" or "out". We have entered a new era dominated by technology, which means for social purposes, an era controlled by social networks, by machines, by A.I., as appeared since the first novels about the transforming human beings by artificial methods: Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Golam, Metropolis etc. It is the time of a new kind of suppose democracy, titled by Guillaume Ern  *“la souverainet  du peuple”* (2016).

Social networks have ended with certainty, with knowledge, with respect for wisdom, causing a devastating effect individually and socially, humanly and intellectually. Half a century ago, only an idiot dared to express his opinion on a subject that he did not know, before true connoisseurs of the subject. Today, any pretentious ignorant idiot says any aberration in social networks and, in a short time, has thousands of followers, crushing with this stupid support, the opinion of professionals more educated, prepared, wise and intelligent than him, but deprived of such an army of followers. The elementary consequence of this situation is that the more ignorance there is, the more possibilities the ruling class has to absolutely control and dominate the masses: it is enough to create fear, enthusiasm for

something or indifference when not contempt, everything artificial, without foundation, without responsibility, and with an immediate effect. The dense “network” protects all this, controlling without being responsible, governs without being elected, condemns without having a trial, which praises as quickly as demolishes. The world has turned upside down with unexpected and unforeseeable consequences: *“Ignorance has many forms, and all of them are dangerous”* (Powis, 1984, vii). Politically, the ruling classes are not willing to share its power that, according to the capitalist system, belongs to them. The objective is to apply the principle of an anonymous company to the political world: the votes are proportional to the company's shares. If we transfer this principle to society, the value of the vote would be proportional to the wealth that one has. In a way, as capitalism has returned to its absolute principles of the nineteenth century, the electoral system would return to the same century with the census vote. Now, this rule must be imposed with total indifference to the masses, not against them: *“We want to be a mass regime, a popular regime, at the very moment when the masses, where the peoples are being ruled in spite of the principles inscribed on the pediments of democratic monuments”* (Adeline, 2021, 74).

The ruling classes know that their worst enemy is culture; intellectual curiosity enables discussion; but discussion is unthinkable in a society that has "one thought" and "one solution" for everything. If the mass has access to culture, thought, and intellectual enrichment because of the opposition of opinions, it is no longer a mass. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, A. Merrheim, secretary of the French CGT metal federation, denounced: *“Intelligence is driven out of workshops and factories. All that should be left is brainless arms and flesh automatons adapted to iron and steel automatons.”* (Jacquier, 2010, 261). Today we are reaching the last part of this prediction. The plurality of ideas has been circumscribed to issues of little importance from the point of view of mass control.

To prevent a possible ideologization of the mass, the point is to replace ideas by characters: a twenty-first century hero is created, that is, a character who is thrown to the fore for his songs, his way of dressing, his life more or less scandalous, his sport performances and especially his lack of ideas. Taking down a twenty-first century hero is infinitely easier than an idea, because the idea lives in the minds of those who believed in it; a XXIst century hero exists while occupying the first pages of the news, but once he has disappeared from them, he has ceased to exist. A hero of the XXIst century is the image, but by himself, he is nothing, he is ephemeral and his disappearance is a matter of cost effectiveness.

Thus, culture no longer has a place in a society which youth is dumbed down from the earliest age by video games that deprive it of all imagination that takes it away from books locking it up in a world that goes from the telephone to videogames. Youth live in a virtual world in which "friends" are not persons made from flesh and blood, with whom to go to a cinema, restaurant or for a drink, but virtual addresses, messages, providing a friendship who have the same value as Monopoly's money. The veracity of friendship has been reduced to the number of “virtual” friends that appear and disappear depending on whether the phone is

turned on or off, assuming it is ever turned off. Addicted to the virtual world, life is not today, as it was yesterday, divided into reality (material) and fiction (imagination), but reality can be material or virtual, while imagination disappears because it is no longer necessary: video games make imagination superfluous because they offer a world already imagined, already created, just to be passively seen. In the economic scene, the concept of work and salary have radically changed because we do not live in a society of production but of consumption. A salary does not have the ultimate goal of being able to live from it, but of consuming; the fact of spending to live is only a means to consume and thus keep the production system in operation. In the same way, the concept of the worker, as an essential element of the system, has been replaced by the concept of "consumer". The importance of each individual is not based on their ability to work, their knowledge, their training, because more and more, machines are replacing human beings; its importance will depend on one's ability to consume, to spend every last penny of one's salary to make the system work. A salary which, on the other hand, will quickly disappear as a material reality, being replaced by virtual payment methods and entirely controlled by the ruling class. In short, as Braudel wrote, "*The world has not changed: it continues to be divided, structurally, between privileged and unprivileged. There is a kind of global society, as hierarchical as an ordinary society and which is like its enlarged image, but recognizable*" (Braudel, 2000, 75).

## **A virtual era**

The truth, the certainty, like everything else that was the basis of our common existence, disappears before our eyes, replaced by concepts that only serve a virtual reality. The information is reduced to a few lines in an ocean of propaganda serving the interests of the ruling class. In this increasingly virtual panorama, few are the States that still have a means of information that together give a more or less balanced vision of today's world. However, at the opposite pole, as an example, the control of the media by the French government has reached levels of a country with an authoritarian regime: the information depends on the government that in 2021 provided the media with two hundred million euros for 2021 according to the press itself. Meanwhile, the Council of the Audio-visual, whose president and members are decided by the President of the Republic, controls what can and cannot be said. Not satisfied with the Audio-visual Council, President Macron has created the commission "Les Lumières à l'ère numérique" whose mission, according to its president Gérard Bronner (it is useless to add that he was appointed by President Macron) is to "counter citizen disinformation" in the social network (Lacroix, 2021, 21). Naturally, it is exclusively that commission, not responsible to anyone except President Macron himself, which decides what is or not, disinformation: it is the Catholic *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, President Macron's version.

The gravity of this matter is that, since the Second World War, no Western

democratic country has suffered such an attack on freedom of expression, while French officials repeat tirelessly that France is the country of Human Rights, an example to be followed by the whole world. Where is the example?

Faced with this world in which all the principles and hopes arisen and been nurtured since the Renaissance, the only possible way out for human beings is to become aware of themselves and to rebel against the forces that want to return them to obscurity and oppression through fake games of democracy. From Renaissance to nowadays the individual has elevated himself to the highest point of freedom, and now is disappearing into the mass, buried under impersonality. However, the mass cannot be free, only individual human beings can be.

More than ever, it is imperative and in first place for younger generations, to keep in mind that freedom does not consist of going to the polls every four years to elect a master among those proposed by the ruling class, but in not having one.

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