

1- We're Going in the Wrong Direction !

The media is telling us, to the point of saturation, that we are living through an important crisis and that when the current elites in positions of power will have reigned in the excesses of some of their peers, this current crisis will have been resolved, hopefully within the coming year.

Their reading of the situation is, in our opinion, incorrect because they believe in creating a new post-industrial society with the same assumptions and tools that have precipitated the current crises in our existing society :

- Currently, our society's elites are trying to correct an outdated *industrial* economic model while actually a new *post-industrial* era that requires different fundamental assumptions and processes has already begun ([postindustrial 13](#)). The crisis will last much longer than many believe because it has deeper and wider impacts than foreseen.
- These elites want only to correct the current situation but clearly do not want to change the model, because by doing so it's likely they will lose their status, power and privileges.
- The economic elites who have achieved success because of economic globalization have to date succeeded in imposing their models and laws during the now passing industrial era. Now, the political elites do not want to abandon what they feel are their privileges and prerogatives. The struggles between the political elites and the economic elites will only amplify and exacerbate the series of crises.
- Confronted with several interrelated planetary crises, the political elites cannot and will not manage anything other than the short-term issues, from election to election.
- None of these elites are offering an attentive ear to the majority of their citizens. This is causing a significant loss of confidence which heretofore has been the social cement of our societies throughout the industrial era.
- This will make difficult the development of attitudes and solidarity necessary to address these crises effectively.

- There are several additional handicaps :
- the strong individualistic culture of the younger generations;
 - the indebtedness of many families;
 - the impossibility of offering adequate services for health care and education because our governments will no longer have the funding after having « bailed out » the banking system;
 - a demographic shock in the industrialized 1st world countries which is likely to make the availability of manual labour more and more rare.

Today's dead-end ([postindustrial 9](#))

The recent meltdown of financial markets, beginning in mid-2008, was a seismic shock which has revealed the dead-end towards which our society is heading. We need to ask ourselves good questions if we want to develop new strategies that are adequate for our collective future.

• **A continuity or a re-organization ?**

The best way to come to terms with the approaching dead-end is to envision some form of continuity with the past.

Is the transition from the industrial era to the post-industrial era only a transition, or is it a fundamental rupture with the models we have been using ? How do we think from now on, in the context of a rupture ?

• **The short term or the long term ?**

Not only do today's decision-makers think only in terms of continuing with the past, they are incapable of developing strategies that look beyond four years into the future and of offering longer-term strategies to their constituents¹.

Should we not use new forms and tools of governance ? (See the text « Tools »).

• **The capitalist system ?**

One of the mechanisms which has brought us to a dead-end is the current form of capitalism². The economic elites have not known how to resolve the challenges of sharing goods and services to the benefit of all members of society ; rather, they have increased the

divide between themselves and the poor³.

How do we begin to build a replacement for the current form of capitalism adapted to the conditions of the 21st Century, a model based on a more demanding and more fair moral framework ?

- **Personalization (or individualization) ?**

Another mechanism that bears some primary responsibility for today's dead-end is the strong trend of personalization⁴ imposed on us by capitalism, which it uses to derive large amounts of profit. Individualized human rights were made sacrosanct during the 2nd industrial era and are now acting to paralyze democracy⁵.

Collective society is coming apart at the seams and is being deconstructed ; today the human being is more free than ever before but has no fixed address. His or her *self* is afraid of truly being free, and is in search of an *us* to which to belong.

After the silence imposed by mainstream mass media, how can we reclaim our voice ? What should be the role of social networks in reclaiming that voice ? How can we build and sustain a participative democracy ?

- **The mass media system ?**

Another mechanism which bears some responsibility for the societal dead-end is the widespread presence of today's model of mass media. We create understanding and meaning from information by processing and distributing that information. Driven by the forces of personalisation, the corporate mass media seeks to convert citizens into consumers through one-way message-driven communication. This does not enable the exchange and synthesis of information between people but offers a platter of infotainment wherein virtually all messages are subordinated to the images, to the emotions and to the laws of the market.

This process is managed by a media elite which is effectively a feudalised instrument of the economic elite⁶. The challenge lies not so much in the daily distribution of large amounts of information but in the concentration of sources imposed by private interests⁷.

This situation presents us with a second handicap. The technologies of communication in use (*cinema, television,*

magazines, newspapers and DVDs) are borrowing their signs and symbols from American culture. In this situation, non-American societies are threatened by inevitable acculturation, and at the same time each of those cultures must wrestle against the laws of the market dictated by an economic elite.

What model should we develop collectively to take back our voice and our being ? How should we create for ourselves a participative democracy ?

We are living through a rupture, a massive and fundamental break with the past (see the text « [Rupture](#) »)

400 years ago, the first colonies were established in North America⁸. It was rapidly perceived that they represented the creation of a *new world* in which the principal rules of the old European world were ignored ; for example, the importance in Quebec of four annual seasons and of doing business with the aboriginal peoples. Early on the necessary adaptations were so difficult that more than 30% of the initial population died over the course of the first winter. In fact, their adaptation would have been virtually impossible without the help of the indigenous population who had already learned how to master the transitions from one season to the next in these new territories, North American *time and space*. The example cited above is useful with respect to adapting to any country, because people all over the world are now being disrupted by the same fundamental break with their past.

Due to the widespread presence of the Internet and a convergence of events in the societal, technological and economic domains, from 2000 to 2002 the world as we know it changed in much the same manner as the example above of new arrivals to Quebec in 1608. The years 2002 to present (mid-2009) have served to reinforce the changes occasioned by the rupture. From now on we will all live in a *new world* for which we need to invent and learn new mechanisms and ways of living if we want our children and grand-children to prosper.

It is not the first time that our society has undergone a major disruption⁹, but this time the rupture¹⁰ is of unprecedented size and scope because all the citizens of the planet are interconnected and interdependent¹¹ ([postindustrial 13](#)). If this rupture has seemed so sudden it's because it has unfolded in a sense at the speed of light ... much of

it has happened via the Internet. This global network, by connecting and linking all the actors and institutions, brings a new set of complex conditions to our emergent post-industrial society. We are finding it difficult to manage this new complexity in traditional ways ([postindustrial 8](#)).

For more than 20 years, many researchers have sensed, intuitively, the size of the changes and challenges which were coming (see the references, chapter 6). However, only a few of them considered that there would come to be a fundamental rupture with the past. Our survival demands that we understand just how fundamental the changes are. We must think in terms of that break with the past and consider carefully how to enter into a *new world* rather than try to continue

References

¹ The current political class will accept anything in the name of their sacrosanct creation of jobs. In living only from one election to the next, their vision is not much beyond the four years they are in power. Their adoption of the short-term drives them to the sense of urgency that created the current crisis. *How can we tame the 21st century when our government dates from the 20th century ?* Barack Obama, investiture speech, August 2008.

² Several premises are currently losing their meaning :

- Free trade necessarily improves its wellbeing.
- Market spontaneity leads to effectiveness.
- The trickle-down economy ultimately benefits all members of society.
- Banking secrecy is essential to economic efficiency.
- The private sector is more efficient than the public sector.
- The only responsibility of businesses is to serve their shareholders.

³ The liberal credo that the concentration of wealth translates into an enrichment of the entire society (Today, this is a promise contradicted by OECD's economic indicators). Half of all Americans own only 2.5% of national wealth; the richest 10% own 70%, according to the Wall Street Journal. It's the meeting point of the speculation of the rich and the indebtedness of the most poor which is fueling today's serious economic crisis. One of the key problems is that current policies continue to create greater gaps in income equality.

⁴ Marcel Gauchet, *L'avènement de la démocratie*, Gallimard, 2007.

⁵ *There is no society, there is nothing but the individual*, Margaret Thatcher, 1995.

⁶ Many Americans have understood that the concentration of the media in the hands of a small group of billionaires is dangerous to the principles of democracy. There's a strong desire in the USA by the media to look at the world in terms of business and economic issues only.

⁷ *Many Americans understand that the concentration of the media in the hands of a small group of billionaires is a danger to democracy. There is, in this country, a strong desire for a media who does not look at the world through the distorting prism of business.* Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, November 2008.

⁸ This year is the 400th anniversary of the founding of Québec by Samuel de Champlain.

⁹ The appearance of Cities and Philosophers in Greece, the arrival of the Renaissance and the end of the religious wars in Europe which signaled the beginning of the Modern State, etc.

¹⁰ A rupture is a period in which society is seeking for new meaning, as the foundations of the previous society have given way in the face of irreversible forces. Because a period of rupture oscillates between innovation and stability which places a society *on the edge of chaos*, it requires citizens to develop of a new identity. We realise that a rupture has occurred when all the indicators are exponentially off the charts.

¹¹ *It's our first global crisis, and it requires a global response*, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, President of the IMF, nov. 2008.