

## [ SOCIETY, POLITICS, GRASS-ROOT DEMOCRACY: A 21ST CENTURY AGENDA. AN INTERVIEW WITH ALAIN TOURAINE ]

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(Translated from French by Veronique Germain)

*Paris, March 8, 2017*

Filippo Buccarelli: *Professor Touraine, thank you for accepting to give this interview and, please, be indulgent towards my French.*

Your French! I believe we should discuss the problem of languages. I give it great importance. Here is my point of view, in French! I am extremely concerned by the fact that in the near future, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in ten years, no doubt in less than twenty years from now, all western European culture languages will have disappeared. Italy is a clear example: Italians have welcome the increasing use of the English language and, as a consequence, publications in Italian - which are substantial in number - are being read less and less. Despite the fact that Italian is easy to understand for Spanish and French speakers (therefore for great part of Europe), as of now, writing a book in Italian means you won't be read; writing it in French means you will hardly be read and very soon not at all, as for German: people have already stopped reading in German. The extraordinary phenomena that was European culture, i.e. a common *multinational* culture, is absolutely unique in world history. It is something never attained before, not even by Latin or Ancient Greek. What is European culture? It is a German telling an Englishman his opinion on what a Frenchman said concerning an Italian. You see? It is a *tertulia*, to put it in Spanish. And all of that will disappear, it's unconceivable! Why? Because none of us will make the effort to learn. I'm not saying European languages, that isn't very useful, but I would say at least a few elements, from 50 to 100 words that are at the centre of these *tertulias* among Europeans. How can you speak of "nation" (to use the best-known example) without specifying immediately whether you are referring to the French or to the German concept of nation? This is no great hardship. I am not referring to science but to social thought and philosophy: in the same way, for every other word one could say "as in Hegel", "as in Kant", "as in Mommsen", etc. It may not be as important for lawyers, because lawyers have national codes of law (though we

could launch a discussion here, too!) but why not teach university people (let's call them that) the ideas behind words that are at the heart of debates? Given the present crisis, it is very difficult to be translated today, whereas before everyone used to be translated into English, Italian, Spanish, French, etc. Despite my advancing years, I feel like campaigning to encourage people to learn *something* of other languages, at least where notions and concepts are involved.

Last year, shortly after the November attacks in Paris, I went to Italy to give a conference. I had been asked to give my talk in English and I had agreed, perhaps without giving it too much thought. However, as I sat there and started talking, be it for the events in Paris which had upset me, the first word that came to my mouth was in Italian. And all through my stay, I spoke a mix of Italian and Spanish. Actually, I soon noticed that an Italian audience, including students, can follow if you substitute a Spanish word for an Italian one, while a French word will not always be understood and, generally speaking, English is all Greek to them. Therefore, I believe one should make an effort, a very modest effort considering the span of a lifetime, let's say six months, half the time of which should be spent on learning (put aside English, which everyone should know) at least one other European culture language. I am speaking for Europeans, of course. For instance, if you are Italian, learn German or French (contrary to my personal interests, I would say Spanish is somewhat less important, given the bulk of Spanish language publications comes from Latin America, including, if I may say so, Brazilian publications in Portuguese). I'm no expert on the subject but Spain does not publish as much as Italy.

Therefore, if you wish, I will answer your questions in French; otherwise, I will use my mixture of Italian, French and Spanish. I must add that personal reasons make me ashamed of my Italian: I shared a long period of my life with an Italian, Simonetta Tabboni, who spoke *perfect* French: her grand-mother had raised her not to speak Italian but English and French. Such was the decadent Bologna aristocracy! So, we spoke French together, since - when I dared to speak Italian - she would dismiss my efforts as "appalling". Her French, on the other hand, was truly a marvel, she also knew songs, arias, everything. However, I am most willing to speak Italian - as horrible as my Italian may be - if that can help communication. Indeed, I regularly do so, and *pay for it*, for I used to speak Spanish quite fluently due to my work in Latin America, but when I try to speak Spanish now, words come to me in Italian. An abominable mixture. I must go and spend three days in Barcelona or Madrid - better Madrid than Barcelona [*laughs*] - to put things straight. Just to say I have no psychological objection to speaking Italian or Spanish, if you will be patient!

FB: *No, Professor Touraine, in French will be fine. The first question we would like to ask you is this: what major social, economic and political changes took place in France over the last decades? What place do the wars with Indochina and Algeria occupy in this regard?*

I would say the most significant change is the loss of access to the political sphere. Politics has been part of the French pedigree for centuries. Today, I would go as far

as saying that the French have no proper State and nothing in terms of political thought or debate. They have become politically illiterate. They are probably not the only ones. However, political awareness used to be one of France's characteristics, just as economic knowledge is for the British. If I told you a British citizen doesn't understand economics anymore, after the British have epitomized Capitalism, Industry and Banking in the eyes of the entire world, it would come as a shock, wouldn't it? It isn't the case. However, the British are still bankers. I even believe there lies the real meaning of Brexit.

The loss of political debate in France and the awkwardness that comes with it can be observed in France's present election campaign, which is as far as can be from anything we have ever experienced before. I could add - though it isn't as important - that the loss of France's colonial dimension is another important transformation. When I was a child, France was coloured pink on maps and pink covered part of Africa, Madagascar, Indochina, etc. But colonial empires have disappeared everywhere, so it cannot have been so important. If I were British, I would say that losing the Empire was a major change - probably adding I still wished to be an empire [laughs] - but for the French... French Colonies never yielded any profit, never, except Morocco under Lyautey for a few years, but it was all extremely limited. On the other hand, politics was part of everyday life, at the bistrot, everywhere, since the French Revolution. There are still numerous towns and villages in France where you will find the republicans' café and the monarchists' café, as in Italy there used to be one for the partisans and another for the fascists. The disappearance of political debate, which I feel very acutely, is linked to the fact that France is not a great power anymore, in the sense that was given to "great powers" following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 or to the nations that dominated the world during the two World Wars, for better and worse. France has almost completely lost its international dimension but most of all it has lost its ability to understand and put into words, to give rise to oppositions, controversies and debates. The loss isn't so much material or economic, France being a country of medium importance: it mostly has to do with knowledge and understanding, with a passion for notions and knowing what we're talking about. From this point of view, one might say the same of Italy, but Italy never had - due to the period in which it achieved national unification - ... Italy never had this passion for politics that French people used to have, starting with the French Revolution, if not earlier. The entire 19<sup>th</sup> century in France was dominated by constant revolutions (whether the word is suited or not) including June 1848 and the Paris Commune.

I would even say that France has lost the sense of revolution. I say this while I never was the revolutionary kind myself, I even have a rather negative feeling towards the idea of revolution, since my own preference goes to social movements, which are a completely different thing. In any case, I prefer to speak of politics rather than revolution. As for political science, in my opinion - that is when dealing with political science - we are always one level below reality. That to me is essential.

You raised the issue of Algeria. As concerns material events, it is obviously the most significant fact in the last 50 years, but what is striking when you consider this topic is, surprisingly, its absence. One comparison comes to mind here: the Americans in Vietnam. The comparison is not with the French in Vietnam (or Indochina as we used

to say) but with the French in Algeria. The United States were deeply shaken, deep down to the heart of their youths by the Vietnam war. Think of all the film makers and so on, who produced major works but, mostly, think of all the young American people. We sociologists would say for instance that Talcott Parsons is a victim of the Vietnam war, that he “died” in Vietnam. Well, in France, no-one talked about the Algerian war. It was taboo. Today, a few historians - at least one - will talk about it, intelligently so, but what is obvious is that France has put a veto on the issue. You just don’t talk about it. No-one talks about it. This is exactly what happened. I can state some cases in the south of France, for instance. If in some small village it came to be known that the schoolteacher, who had been an officer in the army, had personally taken part in torturing people in Algeria, [the reaction was]: Leave him alone, he’s an excellent schoolteacher, don’t trouble our children, etc. Silence. Keep silent. Keep your mouths shut.

We repressed politics, everything that was political. France doesn’t have a communist party anymore. You will say it’s the same in Italy [*laughs*], but some people still had a career in the Communist Party in Italy. Let me state an example: an institute was founded some time ago in France called Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent, the primary purpose of which was to conduct research in contemporary history. The people in charge were friends of mine, René Rémond, François Bédarida, people with a clean past. One day, a member of the committee, an old socialist who had published several documents collected about the French departments, told me he was puzzled because the other members did not want to enquire about the Occupation, the Resistance and so on. So, I talked about it to René Rémond, who was a catholic, very secular in his views, a very decent person, and he simply did not want to do similar research. He wanted to write the history of social security, a perfectly respectable topic but - as far as political passion is concerned - extremely contained. Let me add that all documents pertaining to the Vichy government and the occupation were available, you just had to stretch your hand. But who wrote about the Jews, Vichy and the occupation in France? An American and a Canadian. This is no meaningless detail. There was absolute refusal. In certain cases, the problem was mediocrity - you can’t blame people for being mediocre—but when everyone is mediocre, there must be a reason. I was deeply stunned, after the Liberation, by intellectual life in France. It was the reconstruction period, the time of the Italian, French and German miracles, of everyone’s miracle, with every nation getting back on its feet, indeed a period of extraordinary activity in Europe, including in France, where intellectual life was alive and brilliant: the “French Theory”, etc. But what did the French talk about? They talked about Marxism in the manner of Althusser, i.e. Marxism deprived of all social and economic reality. Althusser (we were friends) had no interest whatsoever in economic problems and the like. Others were interested in philosophy but philosophy without any link whatsoever with the concreteness of things. Not even Hegel was referred to, it was actually the opposite. And then there was Lévi-Strauss, who spoke about the Brazilian Indians which he had come to know in the United-States. In other words, the French intelligentsia discussed everything except France -or Europe - in other words everything except the present.

The memory of that historical moment is what makes me insist on this very concrete fact: the French population behaved as if nothing had happened. The cause, I

believe, lies in France's darkest moment in history, namely the capitulation of June 19, 1940. The country had relinquished self-dignity and except for a very limited minority of either collaborators or members of the Resistance (of course, there were also many people in prison camps or deported because they were Jews or Resistance fighters), the French population pretended nothing happened. I was a student at the time in one of the best lyceums in France. Well, not a word was said. Absolutely nothing. No comment whatsoever. In my class, there was a boy, a blind boy, who was assisted by his friend, one of our classmates. This blind boy was extremely brilliant, the best student in our class. He sat in the front row, typing on his little Braille machine. Now all through that period, I ignored - we all ignored - he was an important and actually extremely active member of the Resistance. He was deported with his friend, who died in the camps. He himself finally came back and disappeared in strange circumstances before dying in a car accident in the United States where he had found, at a small school, a position far below his capacities. I mean we had, in our class, a blind boy which was a relevant member of the Resistance at the national level: an amazing fact! Books on his accomplishments have been written since, and his own writings published. It was what you may call the intellectual elite of the country and yet: nothing but silence, at times wrapped in moralizing talk such as "Oh, horrible things are happening". This country fell into silence: a country which, besides, has greatly contributed to the understanding of the modern world in all of its aspects, industrial, scientific, cultural, etc..., literary lost speech, became incapacitated, to put it nicely.

I'm not trying to say anything original. I believe we are still living through that period. My last book is about the decline, the fall, the disintegration of the French political system. What I found most striking in the present campaign - I wrote the book about 8 months ago - is that for the first time, no-one was for anyone, everyone was against. Against Holland, against Sarkozy, against Marine Le Pen. A curious attitude, to say the least. People would say "I'm against Marine Le Pen," "And who are you for?" "No idea, but I'm against Marine Le Pen" (or someone else). This is absolutely unusual. Normally, you have a leftwing candidate, a rightwing candidate, and people support one or the other. My own interpretation of this phenomena - which facts have sadly proven all too clearly since - is that the system has entered a dead-end because it reflects the industrial society, which now belongs to the past and whose categories - Left and Right, socialism, "collectivisation of production means", etc. - don't interest anyone anymore. You will tell me the situation is worse in Italy. Indeed, the Cinque Stelle movement's only principle is to be the party against all parties, which is a little short for a political program. But let me insist, politics used to have, both at the national and international level, major importance. France was the country of politics. Not of social, economic or religious issues, although, contrary to what it may seem, religion was more important in France than in other countries. But that belongs somewhat to the past. France conceived of itself, it was governed and acted along political lines. The nation or, to use a word the French cherish because it embodies the solution they wished for their country, the republic - for the French, la République means "Don't harass me with the working class or the workers' unions, what counts is that we overturned the Ancien Régime and destroyed the clerics" - stemmed from a small urban middleclass that was not yet part of industrial society, which however never developed very much

in France, except during the years 1920-1970, slowly during the interwar and rapidly during the post-war period, as in many other countries. France was not like Italy. While Italy was under Fascist rule, we had the Front Populaire. One hears a lot about the Popular Front because it is the only moment when we all got excited. What I wish to say is that a country that, from the French Revolution onward, had founded its identity in politics, has suddenly forgotten all about it and has lost its ability to speak, think or act politically.

*F.B.: Could the problem be that the French have identified the State with politics?*

You just quoted the classical formula, “In France, the State created society”. *The kings made France*. That’s how a reactionary or a traditionalist puts it. Others say the same thing, except instead of “kings” they say “the Revolution”. It comes down to the same, i.e. the State created French society. Well, people don’t say that anymore. People today refer to the State using terms of contempt, as in the rest of the world. From that point of view, it’s nothing new, at least outside of France. But in France, what used to be the pillar, the keystone of the entire social structure, has collapsed without anyone noticing and we are left with ruins. We are presently in the course of a political campaign *that has not started yet*— and the first round is only a month and a half away. The primaries have not yielded the expected results, quite the opposite actually. Until two days ago, there were still doubts about who the right-wing candidates would be, or the left-wing candidates, for that matter. If you ask people who intend to vote Left, they will tell you that Macron, according to them, is not leftwing (which is true). So, on one side, you have Fillon and yes, I know what he’s done, but it remains difficult to consider that the former is left-wing simply because he is opposed to the latter. You see, for the first time in history, we witness a political campaign entirely devoid of passion because it is made of doubt, refusal and contempt.

*Pietro Causarano: Going back to the loss of politics’ centrality: What role has Europe played regarding national identity over the last decades, taking into consideration that Europe is primarily an economic and not a political entity?*

Concerning Europe, a crucial and complex issue, I would say first that Europe is a French idea. It was put together by the French and probably could not have been put together - leaving aside Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman - had there not been de Gaulle. Only de Gaulle could shake hands with Adenauer. The others, the Belgians, the Italians, did a good job, but someone had to act. I would say that, for quite a long period, the French escorted, in no extraordinary manner but correctly and firmly, the construction of Europe. Then, progressively, starting with Maastricht, things have changed. I have a vivid memory of the French Referendum on the Maastricht Treaty. Although the Treaty had the approval of every party’s political apparatus, notably that of the socialist party, a majority of socialists voted against it, including Fabius and others. From that moment onward, indeed, the French started to withdraw. But let me add that amidst this sea of “NO”, the only significant political stance, according



to me, and the only issue based on which I distinguish between those for whom I might vote and those whom I would never vote for, is Europe. I would never vote for anti-Europeans. I would not vote for Marine Le Pen, because she is above all anti-European. For the same reason, I would not vote for Mélançon, although he seems to be the most intelligent and active person among leftwing candidates. On the other side, between Jupée, Fillon (before what we now know about him), Macron and the others, it is all rather indifferent, because what is crucial in a globalized world is to *think global*, as is written on some badges. Those who say so are right. It has got nothing to do with politics. It is rather a demonstration of faith in the future, no matter how badly things are going, the refusal of nationalistic isolation and, more recently, of Trump, Brexit, Le Pen, etc... In other words, it is about a position charged with symbolism and indicative of a global content. But that line of thought mobilizes very few people, you would hardly attract more than 50 people if you called for a European meeting; it can't replace politics. In my opinion, we must not either get stuck on the sovereignty or nationalist issue. It is presently the number one problem: how to maintain alive a national state. I say *national*, not popular or *völkisch* but national *à la française*, full of internationalist values - whether expressed in good faith or otherwise, it doesn't matter. As long as a movement is pro European, according to me, everything is fine, it means it is not dangerous and is looking in the right direction. I may trust them or not, think they are too flexible or too extreme, that is another question.

FB: *Your latest book is entitled "A new political century". What is new about it?*

The book says the old political system has collapsed. At the coming elections, we will probably manage to do little more than elect a transitional president, who will not accomplish much himself. But in the meantime, the other parties must invent a new system, a system that would fit the new society (the book goes into greater detail). The two main points of this new system are the following: first, our society not being based on production anymore but on communication, this means that power is no more exercised over the sphere of goods, which is something objective, but over the sphere of attitudes, opinions, representations, which are subjective. As a consequence, since power will neither give up control over politics nor over the economy, we are facing a period in which politics become total, not totalitarian as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but total, as cultural dimensions become as important as economy and politics. Now one of France's well-known characteristics is that its political power has no cultural content, neither socialist nor revolutionary, nor national, nor nothing. No-one knows what it is. Secondly, the new system must reject everything that is sovereigntist and develop policies in tune with globalization, and yet must be able to define a national state, since social reforms are still done at the national and not at the European level. As for Europe's political framework, the formula you wish can be applied concerning budget, income taxes, and so on, to form an European economic government, but above all there must be a true desire for transformation, for equalization inside all new fields, particularly in the cultural sphere. This has become essential, much more than it was 50 or 100 years ago. That is my answer. What we may observe at present in the case of France's political world is the absence of position and debate on either point.

FB: *You have said “I believe in social movements” as a way of opposing the State and you have studied social movements inside the industrial and post-industrial society. Today you speak of ethic-democratic movements. Where lies the social dimension of these movements?*

I believe the new and most relevant aspect of today's society is the penetration of cultural dimensions at the heart of the political sphere. This originated during the period of the totalitarian regimes, as was the case with Nazism and Bolshevism. We live in a world that, as I said, due to the importance of communication, the media, education, or the problem posed by newcomers with different cultural backgrounds - even when they are being denied access and rejected as they are now - has made the cultural dimension its most significant aspect and the one which depends most on national political authorities, since economy, for its part, now more or less develops at a level I would not call worldwide but simply Anglo-American, by which I mean the domination of London and New-York over financial capital. The aspect closest to culture is not ideology, because ideology is not concerned here, but ethics: the assertion of ethical principles. In industrial society, social justice was the core theme of all social movements. The theme of *justice* dominates the entire industrial period. Today, the word used all over the world, particularly in Italy since the present Pope uses it in every other sentence, is *dignity*. A very good word, besides, an excellent choice, and it so happens that everyone all around the planet is using it nowadays, so I don't see why I shouldn't use it myself. Dignity - “respect” is a near synonym, but I prefer dignity because of its moral dimension, while there is an idea of domination in “respect” - is on everyone's lips. Another much used word is its opposite, *humiliation*, used in the negative, as in *I refuse to be humiliated* or *I do not want to be labelled as this or that*, referring to issues such as how women are treated, how minorities are treated, racism, etc., which are all extremely sensitive questions. The concern for democracy stems from what I said before about the State being *total*, therefore the central issue isn't so much about a ruling class or a ruling group. What is essential is the total State.

Not to complicate matters, but when I use the expression ethic-democratic movements, I cannot avoid the question as to which is the essential aspect: the ethical or the democratic aspect? Actually, because of what I said before concerning the total State, what is most essential is the democratic aspect. I speak of ethics, alluding to dignity, respect and non-humiliation, all of which are great concerns, but notice how much prominence democracy has reacquired today! No-one spoke of democracy anymore. People had read Sartori, but... they had fallen asleep over his books [*laughs*], Sartori or others.

PC: *What happened to conflict in the sphere of work?*

Work was the central issue all through the industrial period. Modern times can be divided into a number of broad stages: during the industrial period, work was the fundamental notion and society was best described through specific categories related to the work sphere, such as social class, social movement, etc. Today, the fundamental conflict against power does not take place inside the sphere of work nor even inside



the social sphere anymore, but in a sphere that, in its positive aspect, is concerned with the assertion of fundamental rights. Not with the rights of citizens, as during the French Revolution, but with the most fundamental rights, certainly not in the style of Mrs Roosevelt's Declaration of Universal Human Rights, which is sickly boring but: freedom, equality, dignity, the word dignity being enough. And this is done by fighting the State, which is per force a total state, a totalising power and therefore a threat to dignity and the respect of freewill, which introduces the concept of "actor" next to that of "society". This is extremely important. We live inside a society that wishes to be an "association of actors" and, in the case of France, it is not working out. I would say the same for Italy. As for Spain, in my opinion they have picked out the wrong actors [*laughs*].

FB: *Since work, as you say, was central in the production society, is it still useful today to investigate the work sphere to understand social dynamics?*

Of course. I'm not saying that work has disappeared. Something though has become much more important than before: we have, at the top and at the bottom, categories that don't belong to our societies anymore. Take the case of the "1%" - very cleverly termed by the Americans - namely the 1% that owes 50% of the American gross domestic product. Those Americans are not wealthy but *hyper wealthy*. Wealthier than Ford could ever have imagined.

PC: *A new aristocracy?*

Yes, a new international, cosmopolitan aristocracy, you could say that. At the other end, today, in every country - I mean the old countries, those having already undergone industrialisation - a large portion of the population are outcasts. In France - less in Italy because Italy was wise enough to set limits to the process of deindustrialization; the two countries that applied deindustrialization to the extreme are France and Great Britain, to the point that Italy today is more industrialized than France, a situation that had never existed before - the working class has ceased to exist as a historical force. In France, more than elsewhere, trade unions have practically disappeared, except inside a few public enterprises that have special statutes to protect and in which union leaders are paid by the state, the works council, etc... What it comes down to is that, in its sociological, economic and historical meaning, the world of labour - call it the working class if you wish but it's not the proper word here - or the categories of workers and professionals, if you like that terminology, ... yes, of course, does exist and includes lots of people, but the working class, which is a sociological notion, specifically a group that has political and social influence over the decisions of a national state, doesn't exist anymore. Today, if you ask me to make a political comment about French workers, I will tell you that around 45% of French workers vote for Le Pen. Nothing to do with the working class. These are simply people who have suffered the backlash of deindustrialization. Young people are the most numerous among them because they are the ones that deindustrialization and unemployment have hit the hardest,

followed by employees and by a group in which I take particular interest because it threatens my own daughter in her field<sup>1</sup>: I am speaking of the rural sphere, whose members are increasingly turning to the Front National. That party may well conquer many areas it had so far been absent from. So here is a major fact: the sociological categories of actors are not socio-economic categories anymore but socio-cultural ones. Take Trump's election, Brexit, Marine Le Pen, etc. In Italy, the situation is different because the *Cinque Stelle* movement, I am told, attracts people of all political tendencies, leftwing, rightwing, and from all over Italy, though the risk remains that it will eventually bend in a specific direction, which is more likely to be the extreme Right than the extreme Left. So, it isn't totally undifferentiated, but more than *Podemos* or others.

FB: *In your latest book, you talk about committees of citizens...*

There is no official term, but in France and elsewhere, a term everyone likes at the moment is "network", instead of "party". Networks of civil society groups. Network is a fine word because it indicates very clearly where the greatest difficulty stands today, the difficulty being to have a movement that comes from the rank and file. Let me use *Podemos* as an example. I am not thrilled about them, yet there was originally a social movement behind *Podemos*, the *Indignados* also known as *Quince de mayo*. These are social movements, *Indignados*, Stéphane Hessel, etc. All very positive. Good for them. But in France, such movements did not work. *Nuit debout* did not work, nothing worked. *Occupy* worked. It is actually the movement that worked the best, you will find in Sanders many elements that come from *Occupy*. Sanders is not big, but his action is real. There are no Sanders in France, quite the contrary! Today one must start from the rank and file so that, in the spirit of democracy, the social may lead the political. I am not a republican, I am what in France we call a democrat, which means the social categories must command. I am an anti-Rosanvallon, I am against pure politology. Many movements have sprung up in many countries, especially outside Europe: the *Arab Spring*, *Podemos*, *Syriza*. Today in Brazil there are movements in both directions, not only reactionary movements but also former Lula supporters, *Indignado*-style. In Europe, we are still one level below, namely at the public opinion level, which is the lowest level. This is because of social networks. But so was the Tahrir Square movement in Cairo, that too was a public opinion movement. A social movement requires a minimum of organization and at least some delineation of goals and strategies. Starting from the public opinion level, you must climb up to the social movement level and, from there, to political action and eventually to a theory or the construction of a political language and symbology. This is extremely difficult. I told you I was against *Podemos* because what happened there is not a social movement that became a political party: it is a social movement consisting in people from Puerta del Sol in Madrid and, next to them, a small group of people who run a popular television show called *La Tuerka*, through which they have great

<sup>1</sup> Marisol Touraine, daughter of Alain Touraine, has been Minister of Health and Social Affairs from 2012 to 2017 under the governments before of Jean-Marc Ayrault, then of Manuel Valls, and finally of Bernard Cazeneuve.

influence over public opinion and take hold of that social movement. Besides, their ideologists are perfectly aware of this. Their main ideologist is dead now, it was the Argentinean Ernesto Laclau, and now it is his wife, Chantal Mouffe, who is Belgian and a former supporter of people in Cuba and Bolivia, Che Guevara, etc... She defines her own political line as populist-Leninism or Leninist-populism, and that is perfectly exact because it consists in handing the power over to politicians while telling the grassroots they are good to little more than being manual workers and marching in the streets, but there is no relationship between the party and the people. In this case, they failed in taking over the PSOE, that is the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. I must say, to be honest, that the PSOE itself had undergone extreme changes since Felipe González, whom I still consider a friend and who was a wonderful Prime Minister, pushed social liberalism very far. He works with the money of a Mexican billionaire, makes a lot of money himself, well, these things happen! You mustn't believe your opponent will remain still, waiting for you to cut his neck. So, I believe there has indeed been some *Bolshevik hijacking*, that's how I would call it. Trotskyites, in some instances, have done the same. In France, we had the good fortune of having Trotskyites who were very intelligent people - and my closest friends, people such as Claude Lefort or Castoriadis - but most often, Trotskyites are Leninists, as Trotsky himself.

PC: *Do you think these networks have any possibility?*

When you have nothing, as is the case in France, you must start from the bottom and set your feet into solid ground. Not into sand. Nor on fine talk. Some people must make a move. From that point of view, if *Nuit Debout* had had any success, I would have said: *excellent!*

PC: *What are the possibilities for these networks to evolve into something stable with long-term actions?*

In the case of France, I have my own answer, although others may see it differently. I don't believe public opinion movements or even social movements can reach the political level unless at least *some* elements of re-industrialization are introduced, in other terms, unless you transform today's long-term unemployed people back into workers, so they may become *actors* equipped with words, aims, subjectivity, etc. You see, I believe in the necessity of re-industrialization. I'm not asking to re-open coal mines - the Germans did, however - but to start reinvesting in industrialization in all sectors in which new technologies are involved, therefore probably mostly in the field of information and communication technology, as is natural today. This is why - concerning the election campaign in France - not that I approved of a coalition between Hamon and Mélançon, that's not what I mean. Anyway Mélançon is anti-European, so he's out of the question, while Hamon - while I felt obliged to vote for Hamon in the first round - I would not vote for him as president, because I cannot tolerate one who says - as recently did a leader of the Socialist Party, a follower of Fabius - *I wish our society to stop resting upon work*; to which I answer: *Sir, if our society ceases to rest upon work,*

*workers will cease to have rights.* And that would definitively cut the ground from under the feet of what we used to call the Left. What you would obtain are people dependant on the State, that would provide them with a certain sum of money. That to me is an error of judgement. Indeed, the person who said it has minimized it since, and now applies it strictly to young people and 350 billion euro have become 50, but where do you find 50 billion euro anyway? So I would say that in a country such as France - that has no workers' unions, no political parties, *nothing*, no charismatic personalities or fine orators except Mélançon, to a certain extent, as when he sent his hologram to represent him [near Paris] - in France, as I said, you must start from the rank and file. To resist distortions generated by Twitter, Facebook, etc., you must really start from the grass roots, first of all to understand where things are happening, whether at a professional or territorial level, for instance. In many European countries, great importance is given to the territory, the *Länder* in Germany or the regions, as in Italy. I don't wish to exaggerate things, but I give quite a lot of importance to what our friend Saskia Sassen says, namely that the role played by national states in the globalized world applies first of all to megalopolis. I am referring mainly to Latin America since it has a relevant number of the world's largest cities, including cities of 20 million inhabitants and over. Sao Paulo today extends to practically the entire state of Sao Paulo, so approximately 40 million people, while Mexico City nears 25 million. Countries that did not have major cities up to nowadays, such as Peru, now do: Lima used to have 2 or 3 million inhabitants, now it is more like 7 or 8 million. Bogota used to have 3 million, now it's 9. In other words, the rest of the territory is rather empty. Think about it, taking into account the number of people who have left Latin America - ask Mr Trump how he feels about it. Therefore, the people who take part in worldwide networks live in these megalopolises. France, an exception here, has only two such cities, Paris with its 14 million inhabitants, and Lyon, which is close to 5 or 6 million. In Italy, there are no very big cities, but Milan reaches 8 or 10 million, considering the urban area extends as far as Brescia. Then there is Rome, Naples, and Turin. There are no very big cities in your country, but you have such a talent for export that even medium size Italian cities manage to become impressive export centres.

FB: *Professor Touraine, you have spoken of secularism with regard to the present wave of immigration. The French have a specific conception of secularism.*

The French people, or better the French law, might have proven stupid and aggressive. However, it did not turn out that way, despite the fact that at the time of the French Revolution the French people were behaving in a stupid and aggressive way, particularly against religious orders, who were often given three hours to pack and leave (for Belgium, for Switzerland). It was scandalously violent. But that was a minority, what we call *laïcards*, fanatic anti-clerics. Today, unfortunately, there are similar people, both from the extreme Right and especially the extreme Left, who pretend to be secular or super secular but who are actually anti-Muslim, racist and Front National supporters. Another group of people, among which many teachers, defend a vision of secularism very close to racism. None of that, obviously, has anything to do with

secularism. However, this anti-clerical or *laïc* minority is very active and - with France being under alert at the moment due to the terrorist attacks - it has become quite easy to organize anti-Islam protests. This being said, I wish to say that I have great admiration for the French people who, after the attack in January 2015 against *Charlie Hebdo*, after the massive attack against the *Bataclan* theatre and the cafés, after Nice and other attacks, have remained calm: there was no lynching, no racist protests, absolutely amazing; one could have expected much worse from the French [laughs]. Of course, Todd wrote that stupid and erroneous book [*Who is Charlie?*]. All figures demonstrate that none of what is written in Todd's book is true. On the 11 January, the French went marching in the streets, four million people - whom no-one had summoned to do so - and there wasn't a single incident, not one person beaten by others for seeming Arab or what-have-you. And the people were saying *We must go back to our normal lives, live the city again, remain masters of our country, our city*, etc. I found the French people truly admirable. I am not saying they are the only ones. I would say the same of the Belgians who, notwithstanding Molenbeek, did not react strictly through police measures. And there were no such phenomena as in the southern states of the USA. Rather, there seems to have been a determination to maintain a secular vision of the facts and not to consider all Muslims of France as Islamic fundamentalists. Let me add that, in my opinion, the Italians have behaved wonderfully. Italians have welcomed an incredible number of people, starting from all the people who have landed in Lampedusa! Yet, differently from the French, Italians were not used to foreigners, who used to be roughly a million: now they are around five million and yet, there have been no major incidents, small incidents perhaps. One case in which the French behave very badly is with the Gipsies. Italy has a much greater number of Gipsies than France and - while you may have had, at the beginning, feuds between the Gipsy and Roman mafias - there have been no major clashes. The Italians - who don't have a nationalistic past: this has been banned after the fascist period - have been willing to help, whereas the French government behaved shamefully in Ventimiglia, for instance, not to mention Calais. I can't speak for the Italians, I know too little, but in the case of France such racism and extreme secularism targeting the Koran is regretful. On the other hand, I don't think the French people have behaved so correctly due to any exceptional humanitarian predispositions. Contrary to Italy, where religion is a reality and the Pope is a reality - presently overburdened, judging from the number of people now sleeping in the streets, a situation previously unknown in Italy, because there was the *Church*, the *family*, one's *cousins*, etc. - in France, we never hear about the Catholic Church. When we do, it concerns extremist groups, and once it concerned a cardinal who acted badly in his efforts to oppose homosexual marriage. In such circumstances, we realize how extremist groups play an important role in demonstrations. The same people demonstrated in support of Fillon. So I'm not saying there aren't dangerous people, but the struggle between the clergy and the republic was so intense in France that today the issue over schools has also cooled down entirely thanks to a rightwing and a leftwing minister, Régis Debray and Jacques Lang, and now things are all right, I would say they are fine, though slightly to the advantage of the private Catholic schools. This is important because it means that the risk for a movement to deviate, right from the start, in the direction aimed at by extreme anti-clericals (or xenophobes, that's what they are) is

low. The opposite would mean the death of even the most elementary public opinion movement, while one hopes the French may instead nourish such movements. Will they? They hardly have any time left to do anything. At any rate, *Nuit debout* never took off. As for dangerous cell groups such as lyceum students indoctrinated by Trotskyites militants, they support Mélanchon but they are too weak and the elections too near for anything to explode. It will be difficult for the French to get back on their feet but let us take note they did not fall into racism or extreme forms of xenophobia.

PC: *How do you think populism may evolve in Europe?*

I will give you my definition of populism. The only true issue today is Europe. The countries that have displayed the most extreme examples of populism are East European countries, namely Hungary and Poland. All European countries belong to the same category, that of countries which have entered halfway into globalization; as a result, all European countries are split in two. Countries such as France, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, are divided. One part - which can be the majority, as I believe is the case in Italy, or the minority, as in France because of deindustrialization - called "metropolitan" by scholars like Guilluy, has entered worldwide networks. France still runs its regions in relation to Paris, while it should be in relation to London, New York, Tokyo and Singapore. Then, you have the other part, called peripheral, that is disintegrating and on the decline. I wish to add that in the case of Paris, this means the disappearance of the *banlieue rouge*, all the districts and neighbouring towns such as Seine Saint-Denis, Val-de-Marne, etc..., that represented the working class from the French Revolution to the Paris Commune and the *Front Populaire*, all that is on the brink of extinction. As early as 1993, some of these communes shifted to the Right, to make way to some elements of "metropolitan" or megalopolis Paris. That's where the real problem stands.

Now if East and West Europe are different from each other, inside each area, the countries tend to be more or less the same. The difference between Germany, France, Great Britain or Italy is inconsequential. The difference with Spain is a little more acute because of their misguided economic policy and the subprime crisis, which caused the 2007 economic crisis to be far more severe in Spain than elsewhere, but since Spanish people are active and vigorous, they are working it out. They may still be lagging behind but they are more active than the Italians and the French. What is the difference between Italy and Germany? 5% of the GDP? That isn't much. The only difference between all these countries is that some have accepted unemployment - France and Italy - while others have accepted precariousness - Germany and the UK. What's the result? It's all the same. The cost of labour had to be reduced, everyone reduced it, everyone was lousy. So, what is populism? It consists in saying *We, a divided country, whose national identity is threatened, choose to give priority to nationalism, to reactionary national integration*, and people from the higher ranks of society manage to convince unemployed workers that foreigners are to be blamed. British people are convinced the Poles are taking away their jobs, the French believe this is done by the Arabs, and so on. Trump's government itself doesn't give the impression it includes many dangerous leftwing elements or outcasts.



FB: *Professor Touraine, faced with the scenario we talked about, what is the current state of sociology?*

Here is my opinion in one word: sociology is dead. I'm speaking seriously. In our dual European societies, the conception of society is defined exclusively by economists. Who are the people who talk? Economists, including those interested in social issues, which are in fact economic issues, such as social inequality, which is the main issue today in social and economic sciences. France has played an important role in this field with Piketty. There are also notable books, by Atkinson, Sen, Stiglitz and others. In France, sociology was transformed by Bourdieu into a socio-economy of inequality, but his data compilation being mediocre, it's better to read economists, such as Piketty, who besides share Bourdieu's views. In France, nothing has happened in the social sphere in the last 50 years. No important law. Nothing in the field of education, apart from the *collège unique*, more than 30 years ago. There are no more people who study because there is no-one to study. There are no social movements, no political parties, no unions, no intellectual debate as 30, 40 or 50 years ago. I believe it is rather the same everywhere, including in the USA. The last time I heard of some intellectual debate in the USA was during the great Putnam era. It concerned the disappearance of social communities, social bonding, social capital, etc. which had so far been the common denominators of the American society. But it all came to nothing. Americans today are shut inside their individual consumerism and social networks. Ten or fifteen years ago there was an interesting attempt by Jeffrey Alexander of Yale University with his "cultural sociology", which I find very interesting - I prefer calling it sociology of actors - but he's one American among others. I can't see why one should go and study sociology in America at the moment, while - despite the criticisms made to Giddens, given his support to his Prime minister - Great Britain is very active at the moment, more so than the USA, especially if you add Canada and Australia.

But all considered, there's nothing happening anywhere. This is a fact. The reason is the extreme hegemony exercised by international financial capitalism. Let us take Latin America: it was once fertile in social tendencies and debates, important debates, it's all finished. An international congress on sociology was held in Japan, I don't recall it produced anything relevant. I attended the last congress in Vienna; many interesting people were present, but... I believe there is no more sociology because we live in countries whose societies are incapable of self-analysis and self-action, what I call the French political void. It applies to other countries. When you think Rajoy is still Prime Minister in Spain, deep into corruption as he is; in Great Britain, deindustrialization took place, as in France, but the British did not stop there, they "financialized" the country. They have banks (rather rotten, on top of all) and they will - thanks to the rise of India - probably surpass New York within the next few years. Between New York and London, London may very well predominate, since India is a big lot, and the Asian countries tend to go to London, in memory of the Empire.

For things to change, they must happen one at a time. First, social actors must arise: social movements, political parties, civil society networks, fine orators, successful writers, etc. In France, Houellebecq is a successful writer but he doesn't write about that, quite on the contrary. He writes about France ready to give itself over to Islam. I don't think the *call to arms* is near. There are no social actors, therefore what can a

sociologist talk about? That's how I see it. The institutions are food for jurists, besides there's nothing to say, it's deadly dull [*laughs*].

There is some political science going on, actually better than what was done before and was purely theoretical, based exclusively on institutionalism with erudite terminology, etc. The problem remains: as long as there are no social actors, there can be no sociology. However, outside the Western world, things are moving almost everywhere. I mentioned Brazil earlier, but events of great importance have taken place in Burma, for example, while on the negative side one can worry about Indian nationalism. A recent publication (the second volume is about to be released) written by sociologists who studied with Michel Wieviorka assembles 25 field studies conducted in almost 25 countries. Some of these articles are remarkable, the Turks in particular are among the best sociologists today. These field studies concern genuine social movements, including in Spain and Greece, and that prevents us from saying what I almost said before, namely that nothing is happening. In terms of socio-political movements, of renewal of political life, I am still tempted to say "very little" is happening (including in Burma) though I must allow that things are moving in certain places. Take China! Hundreds of Communist Party headquarters are being occupied, at times for a full week. Of course, as soon as the protest reaches the township level, people are sent to prison. There is still repression going on.

One country I would like to pay homage to because they underwent a terrible catastrophe and reacted vigorously are the United States. The British did not move, while the United States have not let go. Maybe thanks to Sanders' campaign, in the North East, where everything went down, and in New York, California, Chicago - social movements' habitual centres - people have reacted, even *Occupy* is still alive, which is not the case of similar movements in France. So, there is place for hope.

Coming back to the death of sociology, in France there has been a kind of popularization of post-Marxism, as defined by Bourdieu and others, that literally choked the discipline, because followers filled every position, Bourdieu being a man of influence. So everywhere today you hear Bourdieu-like theory. Now - while Bourdieu himself was a cultured and intelligent man - the others usually are not. However, Bourdieu's frame of thought was not sociological at all, and he greatly contributed to this post-Marxist vulgate. So now everything is dead, there's nothing left but weeds. We will have to wait for other people to come with new horizons, which is not so easy. We would also need a detailed understanding of why young people can't find a job. In Italy - it's the first thing people told me about - young intelligent people who reach the age of forty and haven't got a job! Same thing in France, Spain, etc., a dramatic situation. All positions are occupied by a generation strongly influenced by ideology.

FB: *Thank you, Professor Touraine. We will send you the interview's transcription.*

In Italian, I suppose?

PC: *No, in English! This brings us back to our initial discussion on languages.*

Well, your journal is made in Italy. But I understand you have a substantial foreign readership. Given the current state of things, which is not ideal, but given the way things are presently, I believe your interest is to publish in English. Personally, I wish people could understand and speak languages some more. This year, an article of mine was published in *MicroMega*, in Italian this time. So, we must be realistic, but not pessimistic. We should defend languages.

PC: *We Historians face a clear issue here, for all the literature, in particular 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts are fundamental and were written in different languages.*

History is like sociology: it isn't a science. By this I mean that words used in our fields don't have a univocal definition. On the contrary, discussions on concepts account for a large part of the discipline. Historians and sociologists write in similar ways. What we should reach, however, among people using a common language, is a level (not very difficult to attain) of shared knowledge regarding the meaning given to the roughly 100 words that form the basis of an intellectual culture in order to avoid disastrous misunderstandings. Even the concept of "social movement", which is central to my work, may refer to different things, to the point that it has finally been entrusted to *two* different research committees by the International Sociological Association. The first one consists of me, the second - but I say all this smiling, as you can see - of all the others.

