



Independent views in freedom

France and the crisis of democracies

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With a simple abracadabra, French President Emmanuel Macron, affiliated to the French Socialist Party since he was 24 years old and former minister of Economy in the Socialist government of Mr. Hollande and Mr. Valls, managed to present himself two years ago as new sap at the head of a new party of vague ideology that, as fashion dictates, avoided using the noun "party" in its initials and declared itself "transversal". In yet another example of politicians' ability to transform themselves from frog to prince, Macron won the Presidency and his *En Marche* party won a comfortable absolute majority in the French Assembly with a seemingly hopeful program which suggested that, at last, the French people had realized that their cultural and economic Socialism (the worst legacy of their bloody Revolution) was slowly leading them towards a fate undoubtedly undeserved for a country with such a rich heritage and culture and such a beautiful language. France "rolled with extraordinary smoothness down the slope," as Dickens had already observed. Cultural socialism fostered envy and coercive equality at the cost of freedom, justice and the noble admiration of the talents of others, and the French economic model (blindly copied by our pitiful Spanish political class) fitted better into the definition of failure than success. The unemployment rate has been around 10% for years (almost three times higher than in Germany or the USA) due to a rigid labor system and an ankylosing bureaucracy; per capita income has been practically stagnant for two decades; the public deficit seems perpetual (the last surplus dates from 1974), and above all, the French suffer the greatest fiscal pressure in the world, a real tax hell.

Well, in just 18 months, Macron's hope has been dashed: his popularity remains around 20% (like the unpopular Hollande) and for weeks the country has been suffering violent street protests that initially seemed to be a reaction against a "green" tax (do you pay less or does it hurt less depending on color?) aimed at fighting climate change, that superstition formerly known as global warming and turned into a secular religion of mandatory belief. Ironically, it is quite possible that the demonstrators protesting against the "solution" are the same as those who demonstrated for fighting the "threat" of climate change a few years ago, during the Paris Climate summit. At the time, they probably believed that what the new druids were proposing to them was just something poetic and innocuous, like intertwining their hands and humming a hippie song, and they have shockingly

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realized that what the druids really want is to take their money away through more taxes and an extremely expensive energy.

The fact is that violent protests taking place just eighteen months after free elections were held have achieved the surrender of the President of the Republic who, legitimizing the violence of the mob, first withdrew the "green" tax and, as the protests continued, promised to increase public spending even more, raise taxes for the rich (of course) and also raise the minimum wage (a measure that, as we shall soon see in Spain, only increases unemployment of the youth and the unskilled).

What is happening in France is only a symptom of the decline of democracy. The whim of the masses (in the form of surveys or peaceful or violent demonstrations) becomes fact and legislation over the rule of law and the democratic regular channels, over common sense or the general interest of the nation, over the immutable Law linked to good, truth and justice. And this tyranny is but a reflection of the great frustration of generations who were taught that the State is there to spare them every sacrifice and every suffering and will make up for every lack of foresight and every error of judgment, a State dominated by an oligarchy that buys votes with public money, bribing citizens in broad daylight while abandoning the truly needy and helpless, always a minority whose votes don't matter. The great French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, the same who stated that "freedom is the first of my passions", did not hesitate to warn against the tyranny of the majority, "who live in perpetual adoration of themselves". One hundred years later, his fellow countryman Raymond Aron starkly denounced "the double corruption of the rulers and the ruled" in modern societies.

The end of Western democracies being a synonym for the rule of law, for justice and freedom and the dawn of a degenerate democracy akin to anarchy and the tyranny of childish masses cannot catch us by surprise. We have ignored the wise men of the past, whose advice overcame the inexorable force of time, which marks the finiteness of life and human works, men whom from the mist of times long gone whispered to us warning us of man's blunders "to prevent human deeds from being forgotten, in the certainty that human well-being is never permanent," as Herodotus wrote more than two millennia ago. We have ignored that Aristotle warned us that the arrival of the "despicable demagogues without scruples who raise taxes for the rich to please the people" was the prelude to the destruction of democracy. We have forgotten why the first democracy in history failed 2,500 years ago. Author Edith Hamilton, a true authority on the subject, described it thus in her 1957 masterpiece *The Echos of Greece*: "What the people wanted was a government which would provide a comfortable life for them, and with this as the foremost object, ideas of freedom and self-reliance and service to the community were obscured to the point of disappearing. Athens was more and more looked on as a co-operative business possessed of great wealth in which all citizens had a



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right to share. The larger and larger funds demanded made heavier and heavier taxation necessary, but that troubled only the well-to-do, always a minority, and no one gave a thought to the possibility that the source might be taxed out of existence. Politics was now closely connected with money, quite as much as with voting. Indeed, the one meant the other. Votes were for sale as well as officials. The whole process was clear to Plato. Athens had reached the point of rejecting independence, and the freedom she now wanted was freedom from responsibility. There could be only one result. If men insisted on being free from the burden of a life that was self-dependent and also responsible for the common good, they would cease to be free at all."

"We have sold the offspring for a plate of lentils without realizing the treasure we have renounced," lamented Lord Acton. Yes. We have been corrupted by a Welfare State that promised to free us from the "obligations of life" (the big lie!) in exchange for the fruit of our work, our dignity and our freedom.

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