

The End of Abundance

*We have to decrease, but we must do it for real,
distributing and delivering social justice*

Antonio Turiel and Juan Bordera

One day you have it all, and suddenly everything changes. In Europe, the feeling is of a change of era. What yesterday seemed ridiculous today is obvious. What was impossible yesterday is now the natural thing to do. There is talk of rationing disguised as "austerity measures". Strategic companies are nationalised - in many cases to socialise losses. People are beginning to say at the highest levels that this winter will be very hard. And suddenly, in the middle of the Council of Ministers, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, puts words to this pivotal moment and, with a gesture of compunction, declares "the end of abundance".



Emmanuel Macron at the press conference after the Council of Ministers, talking about the end of abundance.

The end of abundance. Nothing less. The background to such declarations is gigantic, and the reasons for them will be

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revealed in a few months, but... What will millions of workers who live on the bare necessities of life think of Macron's words? Where was the abundance that we are now told has ended?

For most of the working class in Western countries, real income has been steadily declining since the 1980s. The history of the European middle class in the last decades of neoliberalism and financial deregulation has been one of progressive pauperisation. One in which most of us have lost purchasing power to sustain the obscene profits of the few. And now we are told that abundance is over.

Autumn is approaching. Indeed, the astronomical one, but also *The Autumn of Civilisation*, of which we have spoken so many times -anticipating new excuses that are now being used to try to cover the moon with a finger-. That moment in which difficult decisions will have to be taken to avoid a lethal and perpetual Winter and to be able to reach a new Spring in which a genuinely sustainable society can flourish without damaging the already battered foundations of Life.

Before we go through that Autumn, as we have repeated ad nauseam, before the scarcity of resources and the environmental crisis overwhelm us, we have to prepare ourselves, stockpiling the essentials, changing production methods to prioritise general welfare over private profit and, above all, sharing better, understanding that either the vast majority of us are saved, or we will perish as a Civilisation. This has been studied in depth and is well known: an unequal society frays and bleeds between the gaps it allows in its fabric. The key to a society that sustains itself lies in the strength of the base, not in the apparent brilliance that can be seen from the top.

For years, from hundreds of places, the obvious has been explained: that the planet is immense but not infinite, that we were bumping up against its biophysical limits. We have accumulated scientific evidence that the climate was going out of control - as we are now suffering - that resources would be lacking even to sustain harvests and that inflation would destroy the middle class. We were full of reasons to say that we needed to stop, that we needed to rethink, that we needed to embark on a new course: that we needed to slow down, yes. But all this time, our political and economic leaders have ignored us. They have preferred to continue listening to the siren songs of economic power to the hundreds of academics, disseminators, activists or simply conscientious people who have repeated over and over again the evidence that a finite world could not harbour infinite ambitions. The possibility of degrowth was ridiculed and dismissed (sometimes, with bad intentions, deliberately and clumsily confused with apocalyptic proposals for the end of the world). The classic smear, slander, something will stick.

But let's leave the past behind and return to the opening scene: what is Macron telling us with his head down and avoiding the gaze? He is telling us that the neoliberal experiment, which has gripped us since Thatcher and Reagan's There is no alternative in the early 1980s, has failed. It has failed miserably. And it has failed because there is not enough gas, there is no diesel, crops are failing because of the combination of runaway climate change and lack of fertiliser, and on top of that, France, which is exceptionally nuclear, is falling at its core: 31 of France's 57 nuclear power stations are

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currently shut down, and most of them will be for a long time to come. The winter of 2022 will be very harsh in France, which gave birth to degrowth ideas. The model of infinite growth on a finite planet could not work and has not worked. But Macron's look says more, much more. He is saying: "And this is going to be on

your shoulders".

None of our leaders want to acknowledge the truth. They blame it all on "the war in Ukraine" when by the end of 2021, the world energy crisis was already evident when there were already starting to be supply problems of all kinds and price increases beyond all logic.

And as for the climate crisis, what can we say about it? It has been brewing for decades and decades. Our leaders do not want to recognise that their only governing plan, growthism - the inertia of business as usual - is failing miserably and causing pain and suffering worldwide.

Because at the moment, there are revolts in dozens of countries over the price of energy and food, but that doesn't make the news. We are cynically told that all the world's problems, even those that started in 2021, are due to the war in Ukraine. Whether Australia bans coal exports to prevent blackouts in Sydney or whether crowds storm Iraq's parliament twice. Whether they burn bakeries in Iran or Nigerian bakers, they go on strike for lack of flour, whether there is a diesel shortage in northern Argentina or northern Germany, Austria or on the east coast of the US.

What Macron - although we must recognise his audacity - does not yet have the courage to admit is that the end of the abundance he is advocating will be painful because they do not really want to change the only thing that would really be important to change: this suicidal, ecocidal and liberticidal economic system. They intend to pilot this new round of austerity and misery with the same old recipes, perhaps even appropriating/deactivating the word "degrowth", as they tried to do at the Davos forum, for example.

It is just that nothing works as it used to: one day, Europe approves that gas and nuclear are green; the next, more coal can be consumed while claiming to promote renewables whose viability is increasingly questionable. In Germany, they go to the absurdity of proposing to generate electricity by burning diesel when there is a lack of diesel in Germany itself. In Japan, they want to open new nuclear power plants when they have not yet been able to contain the Fukushima disaster and when global uranium extraction is falling inexorably, a victim of the planet's geological limits, and is already 24% below 2016 levels, while France is desperately keeping its troops stationed in Niger in the hope of stopping the bleeding of the decline of the mines in that country, which supplied 40% of the uranium consumed in the Gallic country.

It is quite simple: the same people who got us into this mess have no idea how to get out of it. They don't have it because they refuse to accept a simple truth: We have to decrease, indeed, but we must do it for real, distributing and delivering social justice.

It is the end of Fukuyama's story, but not the one Macron thought. And very likely, the only way for history to continue in a good way is to assume that it is. As Cortazar said: "Nothing is lost if you dare to recognise that everything is lost and you have to start again".

Mr Macron: it is true. It is the end of abundance, of the abundance of deceit, excuses, euphemisms, and the hypocrisy and boundless greed of big corporations. These are the profligate abundances that must be stopped immediately. If we eliminate such excesses, the ones you don't want to touch, we can then have an abundance of what really matters to all humans on this planet.



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