



BUILDING THE
TRIANGLE OF POSSIBILITIES
TOGETHER

by Thierry Jeantet

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By Thierry Jeantet,^[L]_[SEP] Author notably of *L'économie sociale, la solidarité au défi de l'efficacité*, ed. La

Documentation Française, 2016.

Antagonism between climate issues and social expectations has crystallised since the yellow vest crisis. From Latin America to the Middle East, people from different cultures are expressing their social frustration. Accentuated by the Covid-19 crisis, the failure to take these expectations into account puts all democracies under the spotlight and raises fears of a retreat into all kinds of populism.

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In the face of these crises shaking up the planet, we must collectively build a “Triangle of Possibilities” based on three social, environmental and democratic pillars. Solutions do indeed exist to get out of this deadly rut – including on the economic and social levels – to restore confidence and optimism, and to develop shared objectives for social transformation in a sustainable world.

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ironic. At a time when governments around the world

have declared lockdowns because of a deadly virus, present in France and elsewhere, the French President is putting to one side the immediate implementation of social reforms which, on the one hand, violently penalise the unemployed and, on the other, make the pensions of the population born after 1976 illegible.

Neither an unprecedented social crisis, represented by the yellow jackets, nor the longest strike French history overcame these measures. Their very preparation once again raises the question of democracy, here as everywhere else in the world, where people are rising up to demand more rights, more freedoms and the abandoning of austerity policies that plunge them at best into anguishing uncertainty, at worst into seriousness insecurity.

I have always pleaded for a **friendly revolution**¹ and for **more direct democracy**². I uphold the idea that the sector of the social economy (which absolutely must evolve, and I will come back to this point later), can, through its values and statutes, be a healthy economic and social model in the 21st century, where great fears about health, fear for the climate and the environmental crisis, and fear of the abandoning of social models meet.

In a televised broadcast on the consequences of Covid-19, the French Head of State defended the “welfare state”. Unthinkable just a few days earlier, will this declaration³ be followed by effects and by actions?^[L]^[SEP] I want to be optimistic and think that we will come out of this dark period, on all continents, with a complete overhaul of the most brutal liberal schemes being rejected by the people.

Capitalism has been presented as the single model since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Left to its own devices, it has, following its own logic, accumulated excesses, themselves accentuated by a galloping financialisation. The crises of 2008 and 2011 have only served to underline the damage caused by this development. What is the point of trying to save it or to dress it up with a touch

of green- and social-washing, with the terms such as “social capitalism”, “responsible capitalism”...? The list goes on and on. This cannot hide the

¹ See *La révolution conviviale*, by T. Jeantet, M. Porta, JR. Siegfried, Entente, 1979. ² *Démocratie directe, démocratie moderne*, by T. Jeantet, Entente ed., 1991. ³ France 2, 16 March 2020.

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reality. Capitalism has entered a phase of self-attrition and above all is no longer capable of correcting its mistakes, of stopping the destruction it causes, be it for the climate or social issues. The time has come, not to change one system for another, one dominant model for another, but to pave the way for multiple developments.

Committed to the social economy, committed to politics, I am in no way naïve about the weight of the power of money or the challenges of finance. For several years, I managed a European mutualist grouping bringing together 15 mutuels operating in 11 countries and covering, thanks to almost 50,000 employees, more than 35 million citizens. I have been able to observe the differences in decision-making and management methods with various different types of investors.

From Latin America to the Middle East, all the antagonisms between climate issues and social expectations are crystallising. The failure to take these expectations into account puts all democracies in the hot seat and raises fears of a retreat into all kinds of populism, while at the same time revealing, everywhere, an awakening awareness in citizens.

For all too long, in the west, the temptation has been to minimise the disease in democracy by hiding behind representative

democracy. All too often the reaction in countries emerging from dictatorships or trying to emerge from authoritarian, paternalistic regimes has been either to damp things down, or to pretend to overhaul institutions, but of course in a watered-down way. Whatever the ups and downs, the conflicts, the approximations, citizens are less and less willing to see their power to choose and to act being confiscated, while values, freedom and dignity are being eroded.

In Europe, there is a deep malaise, “democracies” here, “amoral democracy” there, feverish democracy or dozing democracy elsewhere. How can we not worry about the future? The continent seems to be being eaten away by a more or less virulent “a-democracy”.

We must not overlook the fact that democracy can be slower to establish than to dissolve. It therefore deserves to be defended. Through what I call the “Triangle of **Possibilities**” - involving social, ecological and citizenship issues - I would like to share the idea that the pragmatic expectations of citizens can converge with a profound, bold overhaul of the world’s democratic and economic systems.

The advocates of a purely representative democracy are stiffening their resolve when the question of direct democracy is raised, preferring to evoke the need “to enhance the role of elected representatives, to increase the role of Parliament”. It’s like some kind of joke. They cling on to this principle. They portray any other form of government as detrimental to healthy democratic functioning, as not conforming to Republican rules. They have a phobia of plebiscites and even referendums.

Yes, I deeply believe that we can “re-citizenise” women and men who consider their future is very uncertain and do not feel they belong in a digital society that they perceive as leaving them no other place than as a consumer. The contribution of digital

technology, which is valuable in many respects, will not be enough to change this situation.

The French constitution is timid when it comes to direct democracy; a presidential referendum does not, by definition, respond to it; the shared initiative referendum is a sort of hybrid formula with no real scope.^[SEP] The time has come to disinhibit the Republic. There are solutions, some already been tried and tested, to get out of this deadly rut. There are ways of restoring trust, optimism, and shared goals of social transformation for a decent life in a sustainable world!

The time has come for a politics of projects and solutions to be promoted, something pragmatic and rooted in the exercising of exemplary citizenship. We must put an end to

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piecemeal and compartmentalised reforms in favour of a new reactive, inclusive approach... in a nutshell, a republican approach.^[SEP] In the absence of social peace, a somewhat outdated term, **social appeasement** has become as pressing an emergency as the climate emergency. A positive social and economic “shock” would be good for the country, as well as the executive courageous enough to implement it. Moreover, this is not unique to France. Movements around the world, such as in Chile, Algeria, the Lebanon... have demonstrated this forcefully and in with diversity, without anyone predicting what happened.

In France, rather than concentrating power, regaining control of Unedic or pensions as we have seen, we must unshackle democratic life in politics and in business. This will make it possible to give strength to a new social pact that goes beyond the pact that emerged following the Liberation, to relaunch a

listless Europe and pave the way for everyone to be able, thanks to a decent, better life, to finally project themselves into the future without fearing reforms.

A. An alarming constant

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For many politicians, the climate emergency has taken precedence over the social emergency. This has provoked a rejection in public opinion. The yellow vest crisis was a revealing example: on the one hand, a sort of trivialisation of environmental proposals by the entire political establishment, leading to the dissolution of real eco-environmental proposals in favour of a form of worthy “ecologism”. On the other hand, a scientific discourse that is very well substantiated but which appears to be far removed from the concerns of public opinion. Finally, there are committed, credible voices which, like Nicolas Hulot, have had difficulty in influencing political decisions, or, like Greta Thunberg, have amplified the alert at the international level.

In France, the symbol of a litre of diesel costing more than unleaded petrol was apparently one of the triggers of the yellow vest crisis. Feeling betrayed by the State, which had promised them a more economical use of this fuel, the French population, especially in rural areas, felt they were being “punished” and rose up against this climate crisis, the effects of which they do not yet perceive, and with daily life that was increasingly difficult to manage from an economic point of views.

However, the results of the first (European and municipal) elections after the yellow jackets movement showed that parties that put ecological and environmental issues at the forefront of their political projects scored unexpectedly well. La République en marche, Les

Republicains and the Par2 Socialiste, and all the left-wing parties, all put environmental

issues at the top of their manifestos. The same has been true throughout Europe. But it would seem, most likely, that the people who protested every Saturday for six months chose not to express their expectations through the ballot box. This is the challenge today: to move from a political obsession to a conscious consideration of environmental issues by citizens, inseparable from social and democratic concerns. The current health crisis and the unexpected benefits it is causing (less pollution in large conurbations, for instance) will help open the eyes of the most sceptical. At the same time, the failure of the policy of small steps leads to small disappointment following small disappointment, to the point of creating a weakening in social ties and in trust. There are several reasons for this. First of all, “newspeak”, words that politicians take all meaning out of. Not only by not

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doing what they promised – an old classic – but by deliberately naming things incorrectly and occasionally with unashamed cynicism. Did we not see a French minister claim at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis “that there are good deals to be made on the stock market”?⁴ Several other members of the government have made better use of corporate terminology referring, among other things, to their “confcalls”.

In the same vein, the pleas to promote reform for reform’s sake, without giving it any meaning at all, has weakened politics. Acting

is certainly useful, but it is futile without convincing and bringing people together.^[1] Regaining the trust of citizens must require a more educational approach to public expression and a more rapid implementation of political decisions. At a time when information circulates in real time, how can citizens understand a measure if it is not shared, explained sufficiently in advance and applied quickly?

At best, it will be drowned in the flood of news (for example, the 100% coverage by the Social security for glasses and dentures was introduced at under the radar, even though it genuine social progress). At worst, it will be violently challenged... like the carbon tax on energy and diesel. An emergency that is poorly treated, or treated late, has profound and, paradoxically, lasting repercussions. It is in fact the major social, ecological and economic balances that are then upset.

Along with this, in France, public service missions are illegible. One of the lessons of the yellow jackets crisis probably lies in the feeling of dispossession they expressed, particularly in front of public services that were – in their opinion – left dormant or completely abandoned.

The State has disappeared from the daily concerns of the French: consumption, energy, transport... What has happened to the public postal service? Everyone knows that mail distribution is no longer its only business model. From now on, La Poste is a bank, we might as well admit it, a purveyor of envelopes and parcels, we might as well admit it, but – more surprisingly – it is also a social service (with which skills?) for isolated elderly people, or an educational service to accompany people pass their driving tests. Why not? La Poste has a formidable experience of proximity in the service of citizens and it is this know-how that needs to be implemented.

Neither the employees of La Poste nor its users have a very good

idea today of what they are going to find in a post office... if it is still there or if it is open (and properly equipped for both postal workers and customers!). This is a real issue in rural areas.^[L]^[SEP]Bringing back a meaning to public action means **entrusting public services with clear and legible missions**, by calling a spade a spade. Which, in the example of La Poste, is not really the case.

Another example: where complementarity should play a role – in public health prevention policies with mutual insurance companies – the State seems to be deaf, even though no questions of financing are being raised.^[L]^[SEP]What about the sense of impunity of the (political or entrepreneurial)? Here again, the coronavirus crisis sheds light on this: who knows why such and such a minister or football star is being tested, when “ordinary” citizens are not?

And I won't come back on “scandals”, some get out of jail, others don't... Whether you're powerful or a pauper... it's as old as the hills.^[L]^[SEP]The meticulous destruction of intermediate representations (trade unions, associations...)

⁴ Agnès Pannier-Runacher, junior minister at the French department of Economy and Finance, CNews, 10 March 2020.

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in favour of neo-liberal policies (but which are as old as time) carries with it social violence and isolationism.^[L]^[SEP]How can we restore trust between these bodies – inaccurately termed intermediaries – that make up society and citizens, and how can we renew fairer partnerships with the State? Little considered by President Macron in the period following his election, the entities known as “intermédiaires” have not been educational enough for

decades. Are trade unions, mutual organisations, associations now paying the price for this disaffection? Have they sacrificed too many values to remain attractive, particularly in the eyes of young people, in a society that is increasingly inclined to defend individuals and less and less rallied for common causes... except for the environment.

“Intermediary bodies” are in fact organisations that initiate solutions and are partners of the State, local authorities and businesses. They are, in themselves, proponents of solutions. They must be fully recognised as “partner organisations”.

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know these evils, but they are being amplified at a time of untruths and fake news. The simultaneous loss of collective action and democratic benchmarks makes any learning exercise even more difficult. All the more so as modern wars – in the West – are played out in the field of institutionalised lies, fake news launched to defend private interests or when states want to direct policy or destabilise other states.

Reviving direct democracy is one of the solutions. It will be argued that, in the context of an extreme right wing that is more influential than ever, this is a risk. It should be noted, however, that in Italy, the United States and Poland – to name but a few – direct democracy is not a major component of public life, and has not prevented leaders who are not very progressive, to put it mildly, from making their ideas spread until they come to power.

For a more lively, more direct democracy to be exercised serenely, trust must be restored. As we have seen, this requires better access to public action and the development of an ambitious social policy offering everyone a decent standard of living in terms of income, housing and social protection. Universal access to active, inclusive citizenship and a decent standard of

living is a major objective.

Foolishly reduced to the ability to vote, the notion of citizenship must be rethought in a new republican pact, prepared with the citizens themselves to open up several avenues for democratic renewal.^{[1][SEP]}In a word, citizens are literally being “decitizenized”. They lose their points of reference as well as their sense of community because they feel belittled; they perceive that Power weighs more on them than they do on Power. One of the triggers for my involvement in politics and the social economy was reading the philosopher Alain, who considered that it is time to move from power over the people to power of the people⁵. I believe that a citizenship deprived of the public sphere is as if politics no longer belonged to those who make up society.

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uncertain condition of women and men is a source of genuine, oppressive anguish. The fact that states, however weakened by capitalist power, do not act when they have no excuse not to use all the still powerful levers available to them, reinforces citizen anger. Again, the Covid-19 crisis shows that there are other ways of governing. However, we can

⁵ A century ago in *Le Citoyen contre les pouvoirs*, éditions Du Saggi=aire, 1926.^{[1][SEP]}“Building the Triangle of Possibilities Together!” by Thierry Jeantet

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already worry about the words of the leaders of Bercy, who docilely explain to us that if we open the floodgates today “in times of war”, it is because we keep good hold of the purse strings in times of peace... There are other ways of managing a budget than knowing whether to tighten or loosen the screw.

It would be a fatal mistake to continue along the same path after

the global ordeal we are going through. Everything will inevitably be called into question – and rightly so – by the citizens of the world!^[1]_{SEP} Planetarisation cannot erase the responsibility of public actors. The uberisation of society illustrates the new proletarianisation of the 21st century. No-one is fooled, and the “start-up nation” so desired by President Macron is facing reality. Blinded by the positive image of start-ups, we forget that they do not always respond to social needs and that their management methods are far from blameless.

It is quite appalling that the Minister of Economy, Bruno Le Maire, took several days to understand that “Amazon could not claim a monopoly over the sale of books in France”, following the decision to close bookstores because of Covid-19, with bookshops being classified as “non-essential commerce”. A little protectionism cannot harm our booksellers, in line with the French specificity which, for almost 40 years, has set a fixed price for books.

In the cultural field, as in others, true economic modernity cannot do without social modernity, which does not come through start-ups, or not only in any case.

!B.

Solutions that will require new convergences with two objectives: offering everyone a decent standard of living and reviving democracy.

Beyond the observations that many people share, it is up to each one, each in their own field but through convergence, to contribute to the foundation of a revitalised, new Republic in which people can actually see themselves. Innovative convergences are necessary.

The wear and tear of capitalism, whatever its form, shows that it

has not provided the answers we were hoping for. The time has come to dare to move towards a logic that respects both women and men and nature. ^[L]_[SEP]Allowing the middle classes of society to be downgraded will obviously cost more than providing everyone with the means to live a decent life in which everyone can find their place.

This objective involves alliances aimed at enabling everyone to have access to a decent universal standard of living, primarily in the areas of housing, quality care, healthy food, training, culture, transport, etc.

This **universal goal of a decent standard of living** is an emergency. In 1944, already, in *Combat*, Albert Camus wrote that “we will therefore call justice a social state where each individual is given every opportunity at the outset and where the majority is not kept in unworthy conditions.”

Moreover, it is essential for every public and private official to **imagine concrete solutions to contribute to a new social, economic and environmental efficiency**. ^[L]_[SEP] by inventing new forms of private property,

- by rethinking the relationship to time, ^[L]_[SEP] by taking into account, in social terms, any activities considered as non-professional and

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which give rise to few rights, if any (charity work, family carers, etc.),

- by providing a framework that is genuinely adapted to teleworking and new business models,

- by prioritising fighting against blatant shortcomings in the field of abuse of the elderly, ! children, the sick...

It is therefore a matter of converging to give meaning to our tired democracies, to change the economic and financial situation enabling every citizen to enjoy a decent standard of living. This must be done in at least six ways.

!1.

Convergences between the State and local authorities to redefine the missions ! of public services.

The Covid-19 crisis has brought the State back to the forefront, accentuating an already perceptible tendency to eliminate as many intermediaries, or even partners, between the State and its citizens as possible. A “return” of the State is declared to respond to the social and economic emergency: abandoning budgetary restrictions (acceptance of a higher public deficit, including by the European Union), measures to support businesses and employment, but also possibly nationalisations, at least temporarily. This mobilisation of the State can be beneficial in order to gradually emerge from the crisis.

As often in history, the private sector, to varying degrees and forgetting its own precautions, turns to the state when things go wrong, and the state, assuming its role as guardian of the social and economic health of the country, takes over to prevent a general collapse.

The responsiveness of the State is, in any case, positive. This time it may mark an important turning point because of the scale of this crisis, which appears to symbolise the accumulated errors of liberal capitalism.^[L]_[SEP] The State cannot be the “saviour” alone, it

must change its relationship to the economic and social life of the country. The change, for the moment, will take on its true meaning if it is sustainable. The State must become an instigator and, when necessary, lead, anticipate, regain control, become a strategist, and not only by monopolising sectors of the economy, as Jean-Marc Vittori points out in *Les Echos* (20 March 2020). The epidemic will move the frontier between State and Market.

The State will have to use existing instruments (Caisse des dépôts et consignations, Public Investment Bank, State Equity Agency...) to **invest in projects and companies that will enable the country to achieve its objectives in key areas**, such as biotechnology, renewable energies, sustainable transport, etc.

Local and regional authorities, which have been called upon since 2010, have seen their room for manoeuvre greatly reduced by drastic policies aimed at reducing or simply abolishing certain State allocations. The objective of forcing them to specialise by level (commune, community of communes, *métropole*, department or region) has made local experimentation more difficult. And the many initiatives launched in this or that community have, over time, been abandoned or reduced to a mere pittance.

Many local authorities have suspended their partnership with the State, where they had to intervene as co-financers of general interest projects that go beyond their strict remit (road or railway networks for example).^[L]^[SEP]Decentralisation is regularly called into question. The State is trying to regain control over

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certain areas (training among others), like it did in the social field, as we saw in 2019 with unemployment insurance, after the failure of discussions between social partners.^[L]^[SEP]On the other hand, by

making the management of European funds dependent on the regions, the State has created new territorial inequalities, depending on the capacity of a given authority to avail itself of the skills and networks needed for optimum mobilisation of these funds.

With the creation of large regions, the reduction in the number of departmental constituencies or the creation of new municipalities, the political decision-maker has become increasingly distanced distant from the citizen.^[L]_[SEP] Elected representatives from both the left and the right have made the same observation of this progressive loss of autonomy; blaming the management of one faction or the other, depending on its political colour, both having contributed equally to this destructive movement.

Originally started under Nicolas Sarkozy, this policy continued under François Hollande, and Emmanuel Macron obviously has no intention of “changing the software”, even if - on the provisions side – some improvements have been made, while the real conditions for the abolishing of housing tax are hanging like the sword of Damocles. In this area, as in others, the fear is that provisions will not develop as favourably for local budgets. We saw this at the time of the transfer of powers, particularly when the State entrusted the *départements* with its national roads and the staff of the departmental infrastructure section.

However, the scarcity of public money must contribute to more convergence between the State and local levels. I propose that we strengthen the law known as “Engagement and Proximity” by giving it its full meaning, that is to say, by giving communities the means to act. Rather than seeking to reduce their financing needs and force them to cut back on their spending, go back to the original spirit of the laws on decentralisation, considering local elected officials as adults!

Let us plead for **the strengthening of contracts of objectives**

between the State and local authorities, as well as between the different authorities, in the full diversity of their prerogatives. These contracts must also be developed with the associative sector to give it medium-term visibility and enable communities to have a good view of their practices and general interest.

!2.

Convergences between Métropoles and rural areas, through shared projects.

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The constitution of large *métropoles* over the last five years, despite its limits, shows that intelligent partnerships can be found between rural and urban areas. It is all too often forgotten that authorities that have obtained metropolitan status almost always include (to a lesser extent in Paris or Marseilles, admittedly) highly urbanised areas (Nantes, Rennes, Strasbourg, Toulouse, etc.) and rural, or even very rural, areas, forcing cross-development strategies and posing major issues, such as urban sprawl, local farming activities, access to public transport, etc.

In this area as in others we will have to be bold and find ways of **bringing together real projects linking urban and rural areas**. For example, in the area of culture, the (almost) always urban national or regional theatre, presents performances to the more remote areas of a department. In the same way, it will be necessary to imagine, particularly in the

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agricultural field, new forms of solidarity, to develop the direct link between urban producers and consumers, as has been imagined in *métropoles* that bring together large urban centres and rural peripheries.^[L]^[SEP]The question of transport is also at the heart of this new solidarity if we do not want to aggravate the territorial divide that was expressed during the yellow jackets movement in France.

3. Convergences between companies and their partners, to rethink, along with the public authorities, the question of time and the notion of activity.

The social crisis is unquestionably linked to inequalities in income, wealth and also the ability to have control over your own time. It is curious that the lively debate on the retirement age and the pivot age is so little accompanied by in-depth reflection on weekly working time throughout working life. This would undoubtedly have made it possible to gain a better understanding of citizens' expectations in this area and to take them into account more in the elements of the planned reform. Including in terms of “bonuses” for people performing voluntary activities.

A **new “time policy”** must be devised with the voluntary sector, the social partners and local authorities to give citizens more control over their families, communities, work, training and leisure time... A subject that can be shared if there is one!^[L]^[SEP]There are measures in place that encourage common time to be taken into account, i.e. voluntary time shared in areas of social, educational, cultural, sporting and ecological interest. They can be used, not only to improve a pension but also in working life, for example with bonuses for so-called “RTT” days, or in the field of training, through facilitated access to public tenders (which would have the advantage of diversifying future practitioners).

Through prior consultation with the trade unions, employers' organisations and representatives of local authorities, we need to think about the work/home relationship, giving a real framework to teleworking, harmonising help for mobility, etc. The idea is to design a "revolution" in terms of the organisation of living and working spaces, through a policy of human and natural planning. The implementation will have to be as decentralised and collaborative as possible – there is no need to recreate a Datar (Interministerial Delegation of Land Planning and Regional Attractiveness).

Another example of possible convergences in the field of care for the elderly is the famous silver economy, which is at the heart of today's social and economic issues. Published in March 2019, [Dominique Libault's "Grand Âge" report](#) includes concrete suggestions (one-stop-shop, upgrading of old-age-related occupations, homes for seniors and caregivers, support for home help, etc.). But we need to go further by creating a **fifth branch of Social Security** aimed at identifying and developing a real response to the dependency of the elderly. We must also call on mutual insurance companies, insurers, home help associations and nursing homes to pool their thoughts and move forward together, with the support of the State, to take control of this issue collectively.

Some will educate people about the issues at stake, others will develop savings products designed to finance dependency, and still others will create training institutes for staff in caring for the elderly... Strengthen home support systems with nursing homes as a pivot, set up local networks, vary nursing homes costs, etc. according to income are all relevant proposals put forward by the *Mutualité française*, which the State, in a convergent will, could take up and work on with its partners.

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Convergences to reinvent institutions to provide improved running of relations ! between citizens and their representatives.

In the face of the rejections and protests that have arisen, here and there, through civil disobedience or overt criticism, is it possible to reverse this negative wave? It's not blatant, but is indicative of a mal-democracy felt by citizens who consider the usual republican modes of expression have become inoperative.

But aren't the “civil disobedient”, as they call themselves, paradoxically more democratic than the rest? They express a form of exasperation, with an element of provocation, a touch of frustration and sometimes a bit of shock tactics. But it would be a mistake to play down their actions or to focus only on the illegal, or even violent, side of what they do.

To change the game, we must not remain confined to traditional patterns. Republican offensives are desirable: by organising to obtain the instillation of federating elements of direct democracy in the constitution.^[SEP] The republican awakening will come from civil society, no longer curled up in its own back yard, but demanding and acting. It is a way of restoring confidence: confidence in those we elect to represent us, but also in civil society itself. We must have faith in the search for, and implementation of, constitutional reforms giving a real place to **citizen initiatives**, instead of being eternally afraid of them.

I have always advocated this direct democracy, not to call into question representative democracy, but to make everyone feel that they are an actor in society.^[L]^[SEP] Finally, we must dare to admit that everyone has the right of legislative initiative, so that a subject can be tabled on the table in front of Parliament once it has gathered 500,000 signatures. This right exists at a European level (ECI, European Citizens' Initiative). It allows the European Commission to call on the European Parliament to legislate on a given subject... with one million signatories from at least a quarter of the Member States. Needless to say, this poorly conceived and little-known text has nonetheless given rise to debates on the right of access to water or, more recently, on glyphosate.

In France it could cover all subjects, except – of course – those that fall under major republican achievements (the death penalty, for example).^[L]^[SEP] We must create a citizen's right of initiative for special sessions of Parliament to deal with a specific subject. Such an initiative must be signed by (for instance) one million people. This would in itself already oblige Parliament to debate, without automatically legislating.

And, yes, let us have this famous **citizen's right of referendum initiative**, at a national and a local level. I am well aware of what we are being told: "there is a dangerous risk of slippage, potential for a shift backwards". Hypocrisy and a pretext for doing nothing! What are we afraid of? That the people will decide? Would they be mature enough to put the name of the candidate of their choice in the ballot box and not mature enough to be an actor of democracy themselves? Would they prefer to express themselves only in the streets?

It goes without saying that the constitution must clearly determine the scope of referendum topics. Is there such a fear that the question of social protection, the organisation of public services and environmental protection could be put to citizens?^[L]^[SEP] Everyone must be able to engage in projects of general interest in the field

of their choice. This is, moreover, a necessity in the field. We must build **participatory citizen contracts** between a local authority and those who wish to get involved. This would undoubtedly give

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new impetus to the life of associations, which we can clearly see – and not without reason, given the individualism that has been put forward in recent decades – that it needs a new momentum. These projects can, moreover, be limited to an objective, to a specific duration. I call for the greatest possible flexibility in the legal framework and in funding methods.

!5.

Convergence to take into account simultaneously social, economic and environmental indicators that can be shared at national, European and global ! levels.

Undeniably, since 1945, three billion people in China or India, for example, have benefited from spectacular closing of the economic gap. But at the same time, another three billion people are mired in extreme poverty, particularly in developed countries (due to devastating liberal policies) or developing countries (due to climate crises and the plundering of their wealth by corrupt rulers).

There is an urgent need to redefine, on a global scale, the notion of the common good and of the collective individual⁶. We must call for **multiple growth**, adapted to each region of the world and each State, but with a humanist and civic perspective, making companies public and political actors. Not in the collectivist sense, which has failed in the USSR and elsewhere, but by inventing a new, popular system that rejects accumulation and urgency, but

which aims to establish a sustainable economy that is bearable because it is linked to social, democratic and environmental ambitions, and therefore necessarily sustainable.

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is no longer time to revive the old systems under reassuring terms (social capitalism, new capitalism...). We need to **enter an era where the social-environment-economy triangle becomes unavoidable.**^[1]^[SEP] The battle of words is important. “Growth” and “development” are questioned as symbols as well as symptoms of the errors of capitalism, signs of its propensity to continuously accumulate more: more economic and financial activities, to the detriment of nature, individuals and institutions. These words have thus acquired a negative value. We now speak of forced growth, of neo-colonialist development. The notion of progress is itself questioned.

The philosopher Bruno Latour notes⁷ that from now on “it is indeed a question of prospering, but not according to the modernist version that defined progress [...]. To prosper but not to progress seems strange, because we lack the words to say what it means to ‘continue’ in our situation (...) It is true that we cannot continue as before...”. A view widely shared by citizens who now expect a more shared form of prosperity.

What is the cost of the pure capitalist system, which has sacrificed the social on the altar of finance? Anton Brender⁸ pleads for “taking back the rudder”. Reformism? Or rather illusion? In my opinion, this recommendation does not take sufficient account of the damage of capitalism nor of its self-weakening. Above all, it neglects the changes already underway in relation to the climate, the social state, the civic state, from one side of the

⁶ *L'individu collectif*, by Thierry Jeantet, Syros ed. 1983. ⁷ Interview in *Les Echos Week-end*, 6 December 2019.

⁸ In *Le Monde*, 13 March 2020. ^[L]^[SEP]“Building the Triangle of Possibilities Together!” by Thierry Jeantet

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planet to the other. After a phase of passivity in the face of the social ravages of financial capitalism, should it be put on a drip? That would not solve anything. We are already crossing the barriers of capitalism, we are at a tipping point. ^[L]^[SEP]It is no longer just a question of questioning supply versus demand policy or vice versa, it is a question of **changing the paradigm**, of opening the doors to new approaches to the problem.

This is the first time that the “inclusive” approach from the social to the environmental to the civic, and to the reorientation of activities towards the human and nature. ^[L]^[SEP]This shift from capitalism to other forms of access to shareable prosperity will spare us the eternal debates about the market or the non-market: the truth is that there will always be trade and a significant part of it will always be the setting of a price. But these exchanges will no longer be based solely on financial and economic criteria; they will include other ecological and social issues.

The historian Mathieu Fulla often talks of the imagination of the “left-wing” about social issues. Today, it is time to evoke the concrete project of **plural prosperity**. ^[L]^[SEP]“Can finance save the world?” was the headline in *Le Monde* (22 October 2019) about the One Planet Summit. A certain number of financial vehicles are directed towards green and/ or social activities: savings products in which part of the capital or remuneration is dedicated to CSR (Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility) criteria. These products account for a quarter of asset management in the United States and half in Europe. Some banks have introduced an ecological bonus-malus system (e.g. Crédit Agricole, Natixis, a subsidiary of BPCE). Tools do already exist. Natixis, for instance, has created a mechanism (a green weighting factor) that aims to

assign a colour to each loan, ranging from dark brown to dark green – the palette has got 7 degrees. To encourage teams to give preference to the most virtuous companies or projects, green financing will be reduced in capital by up to 50%. Conversely, brown projects will be penalised with equity surcharges of up to 24%⁹.

The time has come for the necessary harmonisation of investment selection criteria and investments. This very bluntly raises the question of the stock market.^{[L] [SEP]} *Les Echos* (29-30 November 2019) reported the head of the American Carlyle fund, Kewsong Lee, quietly declared that he “sees no pocket of speculative excess”. One cannot hold it against him, so much so that he remains in his logic by asserting that the markets naturally correct their excesses, that a fund making losses cannot contaminate other funds, etc. However, the question is indeed that of a change of logic. His defence of stock market listing clearly shows the effort he still has to make, at a time when unlisted markets are progressing, and questions are being raised about the stock market model. In France, the so-called “popular success” of the sale of shares during the privatisation of La Française des Jeux is rather the result of good communication by the government selling it!

Nevertheless, things are changing, and quickly. Investors are turning more and more massively towards responsible finance¹⁰; institutional investors initially, but increasingly also private investors. In France, it benefited from more than 1,000 billion euros in 2018. La Bourse is an old lady who, in France, was “born” by order of the Conseil d’État in September 1724. The idea was to bring order to the exchange of securities after the

⁹ E. Goetz, R. Gueugneau: *Les Echos*, 23 September 2019.

¹⁰ See *Le Monde Economie et Entreprise*, 22 October 2019.^{[L] [SEP]} “Building the Triangle of Possibilities Together!” by Thierry Jeantet

bankruptcy of the Law system. It has withstood many crises, sometimes reaching peaks in the midst of international and national tensions¹¹. The story is punctuated by the ups and downs of Wall Street.^{[L][SEP]}In the 21st century, global equity trading volumes, for instance, reached \$30 billion by the end of the first half of 2014.

If the stock exchanges remain one of the ways companies can find the means to finance their projects, several elements sow doubt: mistrust is spreading among shareholders made cautious by the crises of 2008 and 2011. In France, for instance, their numbers are declining.

The Covid-19 crisis highlights its fragility in the face of... natural events.

Added to this is the mistrust of companies that have a growing difficulty in understanding why it is necessary to run after a rating that is changing, accelerating the most radical short-termism.^{[L][SEP]}*Les Echos* itself, not *L'Humanité*, recently headlined: "Stock market, a slow agony". The atrophy of the stock market is becoming a reality. The number of listed companies has fallen by 25% in ten years. Conversely, capital raised in the unlisted world is increasing. The increasingly important question now is: how can a stock market system that is so far removed from the real economy, from the lives of businesses and citizens resist? How can we believe that the current rating system could one day favour the inclusion of democratic, social and ecological aspects?

One of the solutions lies in **measuring the value of entrepreneurial activities in terms of their economic, social, environmental and civic impacts**, and which correspond to real sustainability. This will require an international platform for sustainable financial exchanges that goes beyond the current

structures for regulating economic and commercial exchanges (the World Trade Organisation...).

It is difficult not to say a word about the European Union (EU). The multidimensional crises we are going through are an opportunity to shake off the yokes that the EU has imposed on itself: ridiculously low budget, guilty austerity, deafness to citizens' expectations... Is it a dream to believe that a hard core of proactive countries can be formed to act together on essential fronts? In no particular order: targets in the fight against climate change, the fight against social inequalities, the creation of common platforms to develop new research projects, projects by leading companies in areas such as the circular economy, the silver economy, the shift in agriculture towards organic production... There is no shortage of examples.

This may also be – in the face of the weight of the States – the initiative of regions or *métropoles* joining forces with each other. ^[1] support the idea of a **Union of European initiatives**. The “European Green Deal” promoted by Ursula Von der Leyen¹² can be a first stone; it is a promising approach, but it will be misleading if it remains limited. Why limit it to the “green”? Yes to a technological, agricultural and social deal...

It is time to strengthen the European Union's resources. One way would be to issue

Eurobonds up to the level of the current European budget.

We must put a stop to competition policy at the European level and thus to the privatisation of rail transport (and transport in general) in favour of a genuine **European**

¹¹ See “News”, quoted in *L'An Premier du Siècle* by John Passos, NEF, Gallimard, 1952.

¹² Press conference of 27 January 2020. ^[1] ^[SEP] “Building the Triangle of Possibilities

Railway Agency, a federation of national railway companies, all responsible together with developing transport plans that meet sustainable development objectives (SDO) and for encouraging the maintenance of both interurban and rural lines. This agency would also be responsible for proposing piggyback transport plans and for developing a policy of free transport for private individuals.

It is not a question of correcting the European model, but of bringing in a new one. I share the analysis of the American economist Dani Rodrik¹³, who argues for a “model of **peaceful coexistence**” that the social and solidarity economy, including the concept of fair trade, carries within it. Peaceful coexistence including between the European countries of the Union (and if possible beyond) linked to sustainable common projects. However, I disagree with him on one point: I do not believe that it is enough to “reinvent the institutions of capitalism”.

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new form of internationalisation is emerging. It is spreading on the Internet at the initiative of new citizen groups as well as experienced NGOs. It is shaking and fracturing the old globalisation. Movements to defend or establish democracy throughout the world, inspired by each other, have shown this. Movements in favour of the fight against climate change have also shown this.

This is only the beginning of a new internationalisation that surprises, shocks, raises awareness and positions, new forms of action. Governments, institutions, traditional organisations resist or adapt but cannot escape this major phenomenon.^{[L][SEP]}It forces us to question the first of the international institutions: the United

Nations, which although it has been criticised for many years, remains the only place for multilateral dialogue despite the “competition” of the G7 and G20 (which should be reformed and included in the UN system). Including lobbies such as the *World Economic Forum* and others. It is time to unlock the UN Security Council by removing the vetoing power of the “Big 5”, to open it up to possible candidate states that respect women’s and human rights and democratic principles.

It is necessary to broaden the right of associative, therefore citizen, recourse to the Security Council and the Economic and Social Committee, which would also become environmental, it is necessary to strengthen the application of the resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, to integrate the WTO as an Agency for fair economic exchanges, to organise a greater inter-agency cooperation of the UN, to increase the role of the “Global Compact”, to endow the UN and its agencies with more sustainable financial means... Bringing the UN closer to young people by launching, with a replenished UNESCO, a “Global Youth Solidarity Fund”, linked to an “International Youth Exchange System”, to foster mutual knowledge and initiatives of young people all over the world.

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Convergence to restore the notion of popular sharing through new equities.

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issue of new forms of ownership is crucial. It is now important to **enhance the value of hybrid property systems** by revisiting, for example, social economy models, which guarantee democratic management of private and collective goods. This has already been implemented in the digital field, with open source

software, as well as in the agricultural

¹³ *Alternatives Économiques*, December 2019. “Building the Triangle of Possibilities Together!” by Thierry Jeantet

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field, with open source seeds. It is this original and proven system of ownership that should be promoted because it has a major advantage: its ownership is un-shareable. This does not preclude success and therefore profits. Many social economy enterprises have demonstrated this in France, as they have throughout the world. The value created is not intended for shareholders or investment funds. This form of ownership provides greater stability to companies and organisations by protecting them from stock market fluctuations and unwanted purchasing operations, and leads them to opt for a sustainable vision of their management project, all for the benefit of their members, employees, partners, suppliers, etc. The UN Global Compact takes up these values of better-balanced sharing, more respectful of social and economic actors. Several companies have joined it, and the inclusion of so-called “social” or “mission” companies, following recent legislative changes in France. The creation of the “mission-based company” offers prospects as was seen previously with co-management in Germany and *sociedades laborales* in Spain. It is a return to the notion of common

property... in the service of the common good. It is high time to give substance to different modes of ownership, to move towards the notion of **common property** by taking inspiration from the social and solidarity economy and its extensions (free software, free seeds...), or its cousins (co-managed companies in Nordic countries or Germany). The legislative basis must be reviewed to establish a law of partially or totally indivisible

property: property, which is by definition non-State property, therefore private, and more exactly common to the founders and those who join them. This can apply to any company, whatever its field of activity. This new form of ownership can be common to a defined number of people, identified on specific criteria (as in cooperatives, for example), or common and open to those who join it (e.g. free software). The indivisibility of ownership means that it gives common rights to everyone. It can be a right to equal management, it can be a right to access at any time, directly, free of charge, or with “capped” remuneration for creators, to a facility or service. It is quite legitimate that the creator of a project can be remunerated for the value of his work. The role of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) can be exemplary, in every sense of the word. Sometimes accused of having adapted to capitalism instead of strengthening its own approach by renewing it, the SSE has long chosen to live in hiding to escape capitalist constraints as much as possible. It has preferred to act discreetly, with the support of union and social movements and by word of mouth. This has been quite successful in the service sectors and in the traditional charity sectors (health and social, sport, education). In order to develop faster, it has used financial and legal vehicles of the dominant system, which has not prevented SSE companies of national or international scope from applying the principles of internal democracy, equity and solidarity. The question today, in a changing period, is whether it can have influence in fostering **more humane, environmentally-friendly patterns of activity**. More than ever, with determination and firmness, it must apply its own principles and create its own economic, financial and legal tools. Fortunately, this already exists, because of the private and indivisible ownership system, the SSE laws passed in a growing number of countries, the responsible financing/ investment methods it has created, and the self-management methods it has developed.

In addition to this, it has gained recognition at the UN and EU levels. It is essential that it sets up action plans at national, European and international level to be at the leading edge, to renew its tools, its management methods and also its mobilisation methods. Now is not the time to be nostalgic for a diluted associationism, but to strengthen the initiatives of civil societies that organise in the SSE. International social economy organisations must therefore mobilise and act together to build an “international **SSE project**” and accelerate cross-border cooperation (fair trade, circular economy, renewable energies, etc.), create a suitable platform for international financing, sign agreements with cities and territories, change national legislation, and launch an SSE awareness campaign. Including by being a player in “de-uberisation”¹⁴.

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word on the essential issue of the digital divide, which is at the heart of the challenges of providing a decent standard of living in an ultra-connected world. The State has a major role to play, and it is doing so by increasing public services on the Internet. But, at the same time, it is doing away with traditional methods of communication: no more paper tax returns, no more public finance centres in rural areas ... Now the nuclear core of the digital divide is undoubtedly more in the fight against the electronic than in the forced digitisation of public services or in the power of networks, even if it will have to overcome the dark zones that many villages in France still have to put up with.

In this regard, we can highlight the efforts of telephone operators who have been relatively active in responding to repeated calls from the various governments. It is estimated that 30% of the

French population are unfamiliar with digital usage, 13 million people feel unable to make the transition and 500,000 citizens do not have access to a fixed Internet connection. The national strategy for digital inclusion launched by the President of the Republic in 2018 must be accelerated by prioritising the network of carers, young people in civic service, all the competent and motivated people that society has, in both urban and rural areas.

A cooperative, Med Num, has been created to structure players in digital mediation and guarantee a quality and accessible service throughout the territory. There are currently 70 members in this cooperative. Proof, once again, that collaborative tools which respect everyone's commitments are important levers, including for States, when they dare to use them.

In conclusion, across all continents we are no longer in a comfortable transition, but in an **era of changeover**. All the signs, all the damage is there to show it. The pressure is mounting to force us to act. Reports are piling up, alarms are sounding. So, we must **be daring and act** decisively: converge, collectively, by being friends of Humans as well as of the Earth. By putting the triangle of **social – ecology – democracy** at the heart of the action.

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¹⁴ See *Désubériser, reprendre le contrôle*, by Franck Bonot, Odile Chagny, Mathias Dufour and Florian Forestier, éditions du Faubourg, 2020.

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