

## From Subjects to Citizens, The Great Transition

*"I'm writing of a shipwreck /... of what we have destroyed /  
especially in ourselves ... . But I also write of life... /  
of a future time".  
José Ángel Valente in "Sobre el tiempo presente".*

The solution to the terribly serious challenges that we face is more democracy, better democracy. And this requires active participation and a profound knowledge of reality that "educated" people especially possess, in the sense of those people who act upon their own reflections and never upon the dictates of others. I never tire of repeating Francisco Giner de los Ríos' excellent definition of "education," which is the capacity to "direct one's own life." To have wings without weights, with nothing added or adhered, to be able to fly against the wind, and even in difficult times to plant seeds for the future each day, and as the watchtowers of tomorrow to perceive our destinies, seeking to assure that they are less dismal.

Article I of the UNESCO Constitution proclaims that education creates people who are "free and responsible". Education for all throughout life.

*For all*, and not merely for a chosen few. And this *all* is very dangerous, because people with education will not remain passive, resigned and in subjugation. They will not be spectators, but rather actors. Not merely numb recipients, distracted and fearful, but rather transmitters. They will not remain silent nor will they be silenced. They will firmly and persistently, but peacefully, express their points of view.

With educated citizens there will no longer be dogmatism, extremism, fanaticism, since nothing will be “indisputable,” nor will there be blind obedience. Education erases apathy and incites people to action.

Yes, education is the solution. There is no genuine democracy without participation, if leaders and parliamentarians do not truly represent the “voice of the people”. Education for world citizenship, while constantly bearing in mind Article 21.3 of the Universal Declaration: “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government”.

Today those who shine brightest in the media are rewarded, promoting athletes, racing teams, etc. with vast amounts of money and idolizing presentations that seek even greater audiovisual impact. Events are sponsored based on carefully calculated and foreseeable profits..., and citizens without time to think and promote *their* true options, follow as indulgent spectators any events that are presented to them.

They become so comfortable in their roles as spectators and recipients, so set in their ways, that they can receive without reacting to news of corruption, intolerable inequalities, hunger, children-soldiers.

To mobilize, to take a stand, to get involved it is necessary to have time for reflection. Each unique human being, capable of creating, with this distinct capacity that only the human species has. Capable of participating, of rejecting ridiculous “obligations to belong” that

prompt many to support certain leaders or ideologies “just because,” when they actually do not in any way reflect their preferences.

The Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that the exercise of these rights will free humanity from “fear and want”. The history of humanity has always been linked to fear: fear of power, fear of the gods, instead of love. It is essential to overcome fear with words.

It is essential to “listen” to the world. To observe it, which is much more than merely looking at it. To have a planetary vision, a conscience of the whole of humanity, which will enable us to react without having to wait for *tsunamis* to jolt our emotions and prompt us to take action.

Together with serious environmental damage, the loss of values has not only led to dehumanization, but also to competition in which anything goes, with no limits, which seeks the lowest production costs no matter what the social costs or working conditions. In this backdrop, China, “the world’s factory”, is the communist-capitalist country that everyone is wooing. But 1300 million inhabitants are too many millions to imagine that their submission will continue indefinitely. A hint to the wise... .

The plutocrats (G-6, G-7, G-8,... G-20) have tried, and some still insist in doing so, to convert the world into a huge souk where everything, including people, may be traded in commercial transactions. Those who are responsible for the present social, economic, environmental, food, democratic and ethical crises are

once again trying to get back behind the wheel... if they ever even actually got out of in the driver's seat. They control the financial markets, hold high public office, and manipulate the communications media. But it is possible –and hopefully it will soon be probable- that, as is the case in other countries, the mobilization of citizens and their resistance will finally stop them. Those in power, who have always kept their distance from citizens who, with increased confidence are taking the stage, never realized the power of a “virtual revolution”. The capacity for distance participation (via mobile phones, SMS, Internet...) will change present consultation and election procedures. In synthesis, democracy.

Citizens' disappointment at their governments' incapacity to implement the now very watered-down Millennium Objectives and, more recently, their leaders' failure to face their global responsibilities concerning climate change has accompanied their perplexity and indignation at the “rescue” of the financial institutions that are largely responsible for the serious situation we are presently facing.

And the people? When are the people going to be “rescued”? It is essential that we achieve efficient multilateralism, with international institutions endowed with all of the means required to fulfill their missions.

Only then can there be an end to trafficking and the mafias that today enjoy greater impunity thanks to tax havens, which should be closed immediately without further contemplation, since they are largely responsible for the proliferation at the supranational level of

the corrupted and, even worse, the corrupters. A United Nations system that does not permit exploitation by large multinational consortia, which continue to impoverish potentially rich countries, exhausting fishing grounds, oilfields, mines... .

A United Nations that could rapidly deploy Blue Helmets when, in cases such as in Cambodia or Rwanda, human rights are massively violated in the name of “national sovereignty,” or Somalia, where there are really no governmental forces and the country remains in the hands of groups of warlords.

And rapid and coordinated action to reduce the impact of great catastrophes, whether natural (hurricanes, cyclones, floods, fire, earthquakes) or provoked, and which today pose incredible challenges, especially in the case of countries with large weapons arsenals.

And, above all, the transition from a speculative, virtual war economy (3,000 million dollars of military spending daily while 60,000 people die of hunger) to an economy of global sustainable development, which would progressively increase the number of people who have access to services and goods. Development that enables us to share what we have with others, including knowledge, which can increase the production of food, water and renewable energy, providing good health for human beings and Mother Earth, promoting electric transportation, ecological housing... .

The future has yet to be decided. The future must be invented by overcoming the inertia of those who insist on solving the problems of

tomorrow with yesterday's solutions. Many things should remain the same. But many others must be changed. And we must have the courage to do so. We must dare.

Academic, scientific, intellectual, artistic and creative institutions in general are those who must lead this change of era, Ortega's rebellion, so that the "We, the Peoples" so lucidly described in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter may become a reality. With so much accumulated knowledge and experience, the peoples can no longer remain silent. They must provide a guiding light. It is civil society's turn! From force to dialogue, encounters, conciliation. From subjects to citizens, the great transition.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

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