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Crisis or Renewal of Democracy? Power and Vision

Jean-Paul Delevoye

With the presidential elections just a few weeks away, *Futuribles* has decided to look into the lack of vision for which commentators regularly criticize French political life, by publishing a series of articles on the subject. Is the absence of vision real, what are the reasons behind it, and how might it be remedied?

In addition to the article by Jean Haëntjens on the lessons to be taken from some innovative local political initiatives, *Futuribles* gives the floor to a politician, the former minister, ex-chair of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council and former Ombudsman Jean-Paul Delevoye. He gives us his analysis of the current crisis of democracy, particularly in France, and formulates some proposals to overcome it. Jean-Paul Delevoye reminds us of what underlies the divorce between political leaders and the citizenry, and the lack of inspirational ideas about the future. He calls on us to be "greedy" about the future, so as to inspire people to be forward-looking. And, if new political visions are to bring people together, he believes that six conditions, which he specifies here, will have to be met: clear-sightedness, ethical soundness, clarity, empowerment, sharing and embodiment. Will these ideas find an echo among the presidential candidates this spring?

Political Visions and Civilizational Challenges: The Example of Local Policies

Jean Haëntjens

The theme of lack of vision has become a recurrent one in commentaries on French political life. This is why, a few weeks from the presidential elections (which one might wish to see as an opportunity to offer real medium/long-term future visions to French citizens), *Futuribles* has decided to delve into this question with a series of articles on the lack of political vision, the reasons behind it, and possible remedies. Jean Haëntjens gives us his analysis, drawing on the lessons to be learned from local policy.

After stressing the many civilizational challenges facing societies, particularly European and Western societies, challenges their leaders need to rise to, he shows how, at the local level, city and district authorities have held out against the dominant paradigm of development at all costs and have proposed new civilizational models. Acting concretely in unison with actors from all walks of life to co-produce policies, these authorities have developed initiatives in the cultural and ecological fields and in the area of mobility etc. that offer their residents new visions of the future, based on different values. These new political models, which one finds in many European countries, represent an initial base level the European Union might build on, drawing inspiration from them in its search for a civilizational model attuned to the imperative tasks currently facing us (global warming, transition, human rights and freedoms etc.), if indeed the political leaders of its member states are capable of getting a collective handle on these tasks...

Economic Growth and Productivity: A Long-Term Look at the Main Developed Economies

*Antonin Bergeaud, Gilbert Cette
and Rémy Lecat*

For some years now, prospects for the development of productivity – and, by extension, for increased economic growth – have been much debated, particularly among economists. While there has never been so much talk of the rise of digital technologies and the upheavals they could bring, in a large number of so-called advanced countries we actually find a trend in recent times towards lower productivity growth. Now if such a trend were to become established, it might go along with an era of lasting economic stagnation. This is why, in this issue, *Futuribles* is initiating discussion on this question of the slowdown in productivity gains and its consequences on the economy of the countries concerned, as well as on the future state of jobs and employment.

Antonin Bergeaud, Gilbert Cette and Rémy Lecat, who have been working on this sub-

ject for several years, launch our inquiry with a conspectus of long-term labour productivity trends in the main developed countries, focusing particularly on the slowdown witnessed in the last two decades. Examining the published studies, they identify the possible origins of this and outline the longer term prospects for productivity growth (downturn or rally?) that might be anticipated. Lastly, in view of the divergences observed between the developed nations (particularly vis-à-vis the United States), they show how much ground Europe currently has to make up in terms of productivity.

The Hidden Revolution

André-Yves Portnoff

In this dossier on productivity and how it has changed over time, André-Yves Portnoff looks at matters from a fresh angle, aiming to downplay the importance accorded to productivity as currently measured by economic indicators. He aims to show, among other things, that a whole swathe of the digital revolution isn't accounted for by current productivity indicators. It is this "hidden revolution", resting on intangible factors that are more qualitative than quantitative (a revolution which actually began way before the so-called "digital wave"), that he outlines here. Whether in terms of the management of human resources, the internal organization of companies and the management of their external relations, the promotion of innovation etc., digital technology offers many opportunities that aren't adequately reflected in the classical indicators, even though they represent genuine drivers of growth and of long-term economic good health for organizations.

Insurance Jobs under Pressure from Digital Technology

Norbert Girard

In the context of current debates about the prospects for productivity (in connection, among other things, with technological progress), *Futuribles* is, in this issue, initiating a discussion on the question of the slowdown in productivity gains and its consequences, particularly with regard to the future state of jobs and employment. This article by Norbert Girard sheds light on a sector that has especial concerns about the current "digital wave" arising out of the development and dissemination of information technologies: namely, the insurance sector.

Drawing on the latest *Baromètre prospectif des métiers et compétences dans l'assurance*, it shows how this digital wave has actually affected jobs in the sector. For example, it points out that it hasn't actually led to a fall in staffing levels, but to a redefinition of jobs and, hence, of skills. It is with these developments in mind – changes both in the nature of jobs and in relations with clients – that the sector has to adapt and work to train its staff.

The Slowdown in Productivity Gains: Technology at the Heart of the Debates

Charles du Granrut

For some years now, prospects for the development of productivity – and, by extension, for increased economic growth – have been much debated, particularly among economists. While there has never been so much talk of the rise of digital technologies and the upheavals they could bring – and even of a "Third Industrial Revolution" – in a large number of so-called advanced countries, we actually find a trend in recent times towards lower productivity growth. Now if such a trend were to become established, it might go along with an era of lasting economic stagnation. In this issue, *Futuribles* initiates a discussion on this question of the slowdown in productivity gains and its consequences, particularly on the future state of jobs and employment.

Charles du Granrut lays out the core issues here and the main positions of the researchers contributing to the debate. He demonstrates the essential and yet not easily measurable role of the technological factor (because of the indicators currently employed), and also the possible limits to analyses originating mainly from the USA.

Moore's Law Anticipates the Future of Electronics (Futures of Yesteryear)

Pierre Papon

In an article published in the journal *Electronics* in 1965, Gordon E. Moore, then Research and Development Director at Fairchild Semiconductor (a semi-conductor manufacturer of which he was a cofounder), pondered the future of integrated circuits, which had been invented in 1958 by the American Jack Kilby (he would receive the Nobel prize for physics in 2000). In 1965, these circuits were made up of several components (tran-

sistors, resistors, condensers etc.) integrated on a single wafer and performing more than one function (today they are called micro-chips). In his article, Moore estimated that the dimensions of these circuits would continue to reduce and that it would be possible to double the number of components on a circuit every two years, thus making it possible to increase its performance and, in particular, its operating speed. This is the famous Moore's Law. He contended that these circuits would pave the way for new machines (from portable computers to electronic watches) and improve the performance of systems like radar.

His article was genuinely far-sighted, since these predictions actually came to pass. He also speculated on the extreme limits to the miniaturization of circuits, having understood that at a very small scale it would be increasingly difficult to cope with the problem of heat (which is given off by the Joule effect when an electrical current meets resistance). Moore was to reconsider the terms of his law – the biennial doubling of the performance of circuits – on several occasions. At one point he envisaged the possibility they might double in performance every 18 months, but in 1975 he confirmed the original two-year hypothesis formulated in his 1965 article.

Is Brexit Inevitable?

Derek Martin

As a pendant to the current European column on the possible geopolitical consequences of Brexit, *Futuribles* is also publishing this analysis of Brexit seen, as it were, from the inside, asking how the UK government and political parties see exit from the EU and how the outcome of the negotiations is regarded – or might be regarded – by British citizens? Derek Martin reminds us, first of all, of the Brexit referendum's failings in terms of democratic representativeness and the doubts to which that gives rise regarding the real will of the British people to leave the Union. After presenting the two possible routes ar-

gued for by the Brexiteers ("hard" v. "soft" Brexit), and their prospects of success in the negotiations with the EU, Martin shows what disillusionments might arise for the "soft" Brexiteers within the various British political formations. A situation which, as he sees it, might make it possible to reshuffle the deck and open the door to a reversal of the Brexit decision in one of a range of possible ways that he outlines.

The Geopolitics of Brexit: The Risks of Isolation

Jean-François Drevet

On 23 June 2016, 51.9 % of votes cast in the British referendum were for Brexit or, in other words, for the UK's departure from the European Union. Since then, new Prime Minister Theresa May has been making preparations to negotiate the terms of that exit which, apart from its economic consequences, will also have a significant geopolitical impact for the country.

It is these geopolitical consequences Jean-François Drevet considers in his column, arguing that if the British believe they are taking back control of their international affairs, they might well be disappointed. So far as the Commonwealth is concerned, the UK is no longer the major partner it was in the 1970s, the USA and China having both overtaken it in terms of trade. And some Commonwealth members even fear the consequences of Brexit for their own economies. When it comes to the United States under a Trump administration, it isn't at all clear that it sees its political or economic interests as lying in a UK withdrawal from the EU. As for the prospect, hinted at by the UK government, of turning the country into a European offshore tax haven, that idea has not as yet been sufficient to reassure British financial circles. And lastly, internal discord generated by the Brexit decision (in Scotland and Northern Ireland) isn't likely to make the government's task any easier. As Jean-François Drevet rightly concludes, Europe is scarcely any easier to dismantle than it has been to build! ■

Futuribles is a bimonthly independent transdisciplinary policy oriented journal (6 issues a year), also available in electronic form on the *Futuribles* website.

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