

A Spectre Hovers over Davos World Economic Forum: Populism and the Trump Presidency

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From January 17th to 21st, the Swiss enclave of Davos-Klosters is the venue of the 47th World Economic Forum. This gathering constitutes one of the exclusive clubs where the principal corporations coordinate orientations and launch strategic alignments. Together with the Bilderberg Club — a less visible and more reduced space of similar characteristics — the Davos Forum aims to become a kind of parallel private global government, placing leadership, entrepreneurial spirit, technological innovation and vertical forms of direction over and above democratic national order and traditional forms of international interrelation such as the United Nations.

In this opportunity, the last day of the meeting coincides suggestively with the inauguration of the forty-fifth US President, property magnate Donald Trump. In spite his having a relatively adequate profile for the meeting –at least with respect to monetary capacity — Trump, elected mandatory of a country belonging to the G-20, was not formally considered in the invitations, since his mandate had not yet begun. Nevertheless, members of his Government were expected, such as the designated Director of The National Economic Council, Gary Cohn — former president of Goldman Sachs and a regular participant in Davos.



Image: Telesur

Other significant – and somewhat surprising – absences, from the political world, are the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the French President Hollande. Another announced absence is the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, who also announced that he will not attend the protocol acts in which Trump will assume his mandate, a decision that is highly relevant, considering that the two countries are related through the economic space of NAFTA.

With respect to the World Economic Forum, the most outstanding participant will without doubt be Xi Jinping, this being the first time that a Chinese President comes to this hyper summit of capitalism.

But Trump, the great absent figure, will be present in all the roundtables, interventions and dialogues. The phantasm of discontent generated by financial hypertrophy and the concentration of capital scares the members of the club of the wealthy and has a name: populism.

The succession of neo-nationalist triumphs, such as Trump or the Brexit, together with the expectation of possible political advances of the ultra-right in upcoming elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany or the Czech Republic, sounded an alarm among the governors of the corporate world. The real threat that protectionism could modify the chessboard of globalization that the corporations have put together to facilitate their movements, is a scenario in the face of which the Davos conclave cannot not remain passive.

The perspective that an important part of the populations suffering from austerity and poverty, because of the systemic debacle, would decide to turn their backs on the regionalisation projects controlled by economic power, such as the European Union, is an image that could hardly be accepted by the Davis clan.

As the [call](#) to the 2017 Davos Forum, whose leitmotif is *“Responsive and responsible leadership”*, points out: *“The weakening of multiple systems has eroded confidence at the national, regional and global levels. And, in the absence of innovative and credible steps towards their renewal, the likelihood increases of a downward spiral of the global economy.”*

If it were not for the political events, the Forum would continue advancing impassively towards the capitalist reconversion that it proposes and which has been called the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

This ‘revolution’ — in the words of the Founder and President of the Forum, the almost eighty-year-old German professor Klaus Schwab - *“is characterized by the fusion of technologies that are erasing the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres.”*

The earlier technological revolutions, Schwab points out, used water and steam to mechanize production, electricity to massify it and electronics and computing to automate it.

In this ‘new world’ in development, the promoters of Davos — the principal enterprises of the planet — see exponential opportunities for business. In the framework of refined business prospects, designed to outline the possible advantages for those who acquire their products and adhere to their illusions, it is clear that they feel obliged to also allude to the enormous possibilities that this could bring to millions of persons. In these arguments over potential benefits, there is a possible “and complete (!)” reconversion of the degenerative environmental process — that these same enterprises have brought about - with unlimited possibilities that are derived from combined and integrated action — says Schwab — of *“artificial intelligence, robotics, the internet of things, autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, nano- and biotechnology, the sciences of matter, new devices for storing energy and quantum computing.”*

These knights of the order (and under the order) of money are daring and they dare to revolutionize the world. The only thing that seems unchangeable in their imagination is the existence and pre-eminence of economic power over the well-being and the sovereign decision of the majorities.

Nonetheless, in this edition of Davos, it does not appear viable to advance in the absolutist plans of social technologization without taking into account, at least minimally, the social chaos that they have produced in the past. And they will produce even more, if the technological innovations take on the increased velocity that they desire. While today, extreme poverty, hunger and social inequality are already devastating vast latitudes, there

is a risk they will increase even more if the “fourth revolution” is managed by these corporations and their lackeys.

A complete and integrated automation in production brings about the elimination of millions of jobs. In absence of an inversion of power relations, between the effective power of peoples and concentrated economic power, we can expect brutal competition among wage earners begging for subsistence in exchange for their total existential surrender.

Even the analysts of the corporate camp foresee a probable widening of the gaps between the better paid segments — those that require knowledge and specialization — and other kinds of tasks — essentially services of little value added, habitually reserved for the poorest among the poor.

From a positive perspective, for human beings the technological transformation could signify a growing liberation from tasks, an increase of creative options and possibilities, an extension of life and well-being, which could lead to a profound and interesting reconsideration on life perspectives that do not have work as the centre, the main condition or the cause of exclusion. But without a true social and popular mediation, it would simply bring about an increase in business efficiency, leaving a great part of humanity in the garbage bin of maladaptation and the consequent disqualification as waste material.

What the worried businessmen, academics and politicians in Davos fear, associating it with the tragedies of fascism of the past century, what they despise, calling it “populism” — thus indicating a visceral and plutocratic rejection of the “popular” — is in fact a clear signal that the peoples are emitting in rejection of the prior business visions that promised marvellous benefits for all through the route of neoliberalism.

In a sense, in the present edition of Davos, there may be something that is beginning to be socialized. Uncertainty no longer appears to be an exclusive prerogative of the dispossessed.

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(Translated for ALAI by Jordan Bishop)

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