

It Will be Reborn from the Ashes

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To defeat as to victory

Last 17th of June, Raymond Domenech, selected by the French football team, was on the microphone of channel M6. After his team's defeat, 2-0 playing Italy, he came out with: "This team has a future, a true potential. I am proud of those young people who have shown that they can claim to have great careers." This leaves a vague impression of the already-seen. How does one forget it? This image is there, thrown out just like that. We have Ségolène Royal perched on the terrace of the seat of the socialist party, Solférino Street. We are at the eve of another kind of defeat. A defeat that is more serious, although to be expected and, dare I say, prepared by Nicolas Sarkozy who has been elected President of the French Republic. Ségolène Royal harangues the crowd: "Let's go on to other victories!" The crowd responds. The crowd acclaims her.

One must understand these words literally. On that day, the French left, or rather, Ségolène Royal, who represents most of the left, has been elected and, indeed, elected as the head to lead the presidential battle. She believes she is it, is victorious.

Sticking to the adversary

Behind this curious word, which still resonates in our ears—"Let's go on to other victories!"—there is an error of good faith. Of all errors, that of good faith is the most unpardonable, Lacan says as a good "Freudian." He knew that the failed act is the one that always succeeds. To lose to Sarkozy, one must believe that the left wanted it, or, in any case, that it has not wanted it enough to prevent it, which comes down to the same thing, to judge by the consequences.

What we say about these elections, we could say about any election, whatever the stakes may be. And what can one say about the defeat of Mospin against Le Pen—a serious *failed act* to which the socialist party reacted by offering us to fight behind François Hollande, in other words, beside Ségolène Royal? Yes, it is the elections game: when one wins, one says

that the other, in a certain fashion, let him win. For any loser there is always a fascination, a sticking to—even if it be unconscious—his rival. But this time, outside the fact that the candidate has sometimes hunted on the grounds of the populist right, things are said. And these words sound true, in one's mouth these words have an accent of truth. It is for sure that some victories like these—looking to our Joan of Arc of modern times [Ségolène Royal]—we will know some new ones.

The symptom of the PS

Since the beginning of the campaign, the young leftist generation has been disoriented. The blow is astonishing,—the organized defeat of a disintegrated left—and it is sadder this time than the preceding time. Jospin had been “naïve”, but the men and women of the left followed him still. Today, certain ones among the best have jumped ship. Whose fault is it? Whose? Is it that of the reeducation camps of the military? Is it because of its words regarding Chinese justice? Is it these little flags? Partly, without a doubt. But let us not make a mistake ourselves. Ségolène Royal is not the cause of the defeat of the socialist party. She is the symptom of it.¹ The socialists chose her because they recognized themselves in her. Is it the socialists' fault, then? Certainly. Ségolène Royal and her failure indicate something of their being in the XXIst century.

Only because the reign of the object

At least one text, a text of around six pages, not one more, appeared in 2002, five years, then, before this electoral fiasco. It gave to the one on the left his tomb and administered extreme unction to him. Jacques-Alain Miller gave the support of his own thesis there by a statement: “The man-on-the-left, in the course of time, admits to himself successively what he already knew. He admits that it was reconciled with its consummation, and even that he enjoyed it [...] He admits that he was reconciled with capitalism and with the market, even if he withdrew from it.”² The man-of-the-left is dead “under a rain of objects”³—those produced by modernity—, dead by having yielded to the sirens of the object which pretends to fill our wants. Because he also wants to enjoy and not only experience

privation, in his turn, he forsakes with his object: he enjoys alone, but dreaming like everyone of the iPhone, the iMac, the iPod, the Breitling, of Ray-Bans. If the Smart... Even Ingrid Bétancourt—this other national Madonna of whom one is a little captive these days—this one—yields to the pleasure of consummations, then, capitalism has won all its battles. The regimes which fight against it still are definitely out of style. Existential questions are finished. The themes which gave honor to the French left—school and public service, notably—no longer federate. Unhappy workers are importuned. For a long time, strikes have been nothing more than a party [*une fête*].

Here and there one hears that the left still has some ideas. But what are they, exactly, these ideas? And how does it happen that not one of them is capable of federating, of joining together, and, first, because it is a priority, in order to make themselves heard? One must believe that objects have replaced ideas.

The imaginary of the left, decidedly impotent, has fallen into the public domain. A candidate from the right can borrow from it his figures who are tutors, because memory “no longer makes authority; it is, however, outclassed everywhere by accelerated innovation, programmed obsolescence. The past is struck by a less-value [...]; the master word is the future.”⁴

The Wall

1989. Marxism would be dead, dragging all the left in its fall. What would remain of it from now on would only be dust and rubble. But how can one understand the death of the extreme left—which has always rivaled its talent with the reformist left, succeeding in weakening it—this left which has itself renounced revolution for a long time? When Mitterand adroitly grabbed the voices of the extreme left in 1981, the operation succeeded for him.⁵ Doubtlessly, in this period, the extreme left was still alive. It is also doubtless that today, the left and the extreme left suffer from the same evils. But it is not the fall of the wall which has killed Marxism, it is, rather, the already dead, moribund Marxism which made the wall fall. In truth, to follow with another small text, communist regimes have always aimed at money. Lacan speaks (we are in the

epoch when the United States was going to recognize China at the time of the revolution): “1917, China and, however, nothing else in all that than the absolute master signifier, money, the master signifier, is as always, universal capitalism, in Peking itself, nothing counts except the recognition of this mark.”⁶ Thus, as paradoxical as that may seem, one would have to date the long decline of Marxist ideology, not the fall of the wall, but of its building. Because, let us remember, the wall was put up to stop the flight of the Berliners into capitalist land. Thus, one gets the sense of the obscene image that Claude Lanzmann evokes in these pages: the wall falls and the Germans from the East, faithful—we understand that now—to the values of the left, hurry onto the banks of the West. The *Deutsche Mark* which has looked at them for so long, and even scoffed at them, is there to finally hold its arms open to them.

Desire of the Left

If it is true, then, that the French left has no more ideas—nor of this fact of the future—then, how can they continue to be astonished by the indolence of a François Hollande of whom one says to be deprived of it at the least, of the funny, the sensitive, the spiritual? On the 28th of April 2008 he is invited on I-Television. He has exchanged pompous gibberish and special babble for a clear language: *Why, a French journalist asks him, did you not yourself create reform for the retirees? In not doing it, you left the field open to the right. Then, certainly, you criticize it today, but one is never better served than by oneself.* Response of the First Secretary: *Because we did not imagine – and it was a mistake – that the right would succeed us.*

What remains of the French left? Certain ones are very much on the left – among whom are the disinherited ones that the Capitalist machine produces in great numbers – and would like to resuscitate the fervor of the days of October, swearing that they will do better than their sad predecessors. On the left, others dispute over the head of the acephalic party. The man-on-the-left is, indeed, dead, and one must believe it from the most illuminated, since [they were the most] beautiful, ages ago. Must one, for all this, scream with Sarkozy: “Long live

the right!”, “Long live the object!”? That is not certain. There is an urgency, in fact, for an opposition party to exist again in France; it comes from the democratic life of our country. In order to convince us, and to defend, actually, the human at the heart of the market economy, it would be necessary that the left recognize that the hour has lured the reign of the object and that it cease smugly deploring this state of fact. Because without the link of an instructed opposition, organized, constructed, and thought out, the left is only a community organized by tradition, and its politics make a communitarianism. However, it will be reborn from its ashes, it is necessary.

Translated by Ellie Ragland

Endnotes

¹If Ségolène Royal has known success particularly in relation to the new militants of the Socialist Party, there, still, one must believe that Fabius, Strauss Kahn and other Emmanuelles have not wanted enough to represent the Party against her.

²Jacques-Alain Miller, *Le neveu de Lacan*, “Le tombeau de l’Homme –de-gauche,” Paris, Verdier, 2002, p. 161-166.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 163-164.

⁵In the same vein, when Sarkozy took those of Le Pen no less adroitly in 2007, the UMP left the affair reinforced. It is not impossible moreover that the right congratulates itself and today encourages the emergence of the anticapitalist movement of a Besancenot who would still weaken .if it is possible, the Socialist Party.

⁶François Regnault, “Vos paroles m’ont frappé,” *Ornicar*, no. 49, Paris, Agalma, 1998.

