



"Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe."

(Abraham Lincoln)

Common Sense or Insanity?

During the twentieth century, the sixties were known as a decade of change, but, above all, they were a historical juncture when humanity began a new era: the transition from modernity to – what we now call – postmodernity.

The twentieth century witnessed two world wars, technical-scientific failures in solving the most pressing problems facing society and humanity, and the failure of political and economic systems to eradicate inequality, social injustice, and poverty – systems that, on the altar of ideologies, sacrificed human freedom and equality. This, in turn, provoked a feeling that history lacked a future and frustrated our hopes for progress. A lack of motivation in humanity's efforts and work ensued, followed by a disposition towards the quick and easy, apathy toward the common good, and a search for refuge in everything individual and personal, with the consequent rejection of everything hierarchical and institutional.

Institutional and absolute truths disappeared. Each individual functions and lives according to the menu of their own "truths" amidst uncertainty, moral relativism, subjectivism, and an overload of information where nothing matters, or everything carries the same weight.

What matters – for the postmodern man – is enjoyment. The hedonistic search for pleasure for pleasure's sake governs human existence. To achieve it – at any cost – you have to have. Now, aesthetics precedes ethics, having over being, the tangible, and material over the transcendent.

Resulting from these new features of postmodernity is a "culture" of the light, ethereal, easy, disposable, superficial, and uncommitted, together with the pursuit of a lifestyle of luxury, comfort, and waste, indifferent to the needs of the great masses of the population.

These features, characteristic of postmodernity, affect, explain, influence, and are evident in the life and behavior of all human beings and their social dimension: from citizen coexistence to how we approach politics. By "politics," according to the original Greek concept, I mean not only the office that governs but, above all, the participation of all citizens in the search for the common good of the "*polis*," the city.

No one is unaware that today, the profession and exercise of politics –critical in the work of leadership and social construction – is also the most discredited. This is especially true since politicians have dedicated themselves to the pursuit of personal and private goods and have forgotten the search for the common good.

This discrediting of the profession and exercise of politics causes, at the same time, a crisis in "democracy" as a system of government that guarantees respect for the rights of citizens and the greater participation of all in the construction of the best collective aspirations.

Many factors explain this discrediting of politicians and the exercise of politics. As a result, these factors undermine democracy and trust in its institutions. Of particular note, among others, is the corruption in public and private administration, with the resulting frustration and discontent; social inequality and the consequent resentment it generates; and the weakening of the institutions that should ensure compliance with the law and respect for everyone's rights, as a cause and effect of this crisis and the apathy and political indifference that all of this produces, as a breeding ground for the emergence of anti-democratic agents and movements.

For the brevity that this writing demands of me, I will limit myself to underlining two fundamental aspects of this crisis: ***post-truth and populism.***

Hannah Arendt, the great philosopher and historian, in her discourse on "Truth and Politics," laments that "truth and politics have never stood on common ground" and that "truthfulness has never been counted among political virtues." Without institutions (political or religious) that – in modernity – dictate an objective and universally valid truth and amidst the chaos and meaninglessness of living without certainties, postmodern man lives constructing "his own" truths, half-truths, or absolute lies that justify his lifestyle, interests, behavior, and his existence and being in the world. The exercise of politics is turned into politicking and demagoguery.

We are witnessing – bewildered and terrified – the preaching and propagation of lies as truths; the justification of arbitrary decisions, violence, repression, and even wars through lies and fallacies repeated to make them appear to be truths; and the imposition of post-truths as if they were the truth. We live overwhelmed by the overload of disinformation or false political information designed to manipulate public opinion and achieve reprehensible objectives, ends that never benefit the common good, nor are they in accordance with common sense or with the best human values and desires.

The "truth" of postmodernity or "*post-truth*," as it is called today, so highly regarded and widely used by professionals politicking in electoral campaigns and government decisions, gives greater value and weight to emotions and collective hysteria than to reason or facts and evidence. It selectively distorts reality to base self-serving narratives and confuses the human task of differentiating truth from lies.

Since we are not allowed to know the truth of the facts and lies are told repeatedly and unscrupulously, if we abide by Abraham Lincoln's maxim: "Let the people know the facts (the truth) and the country will be safe," we live today - thanks to the farce and hypocrisy as a lifestyle and profession of our politicians and rulers on duty - in a national and international situation of insecurity, defenselessness, instability, mistrust, lack of protection, uncertainty, and perplexity.

Populism falsely and nefariously exercises politicking, appearing as politics. Populism and populists exist in every area of social life: among politicians of the right, center, or left, among religious leaders, among managers, businesspeople, teachers, and parents etc. Many societies worldwide are already being led by populists and dishonest people, afraid to discover and announce the truth, prone to flattery, complicity, complacency, and hypocrisy, to double standards that are incoherent between words and deeds, between what is believed and what is lived, between what is preached and what is practiced.

Populism is led by charismatic "leaders" who can connect with the emotions, prejudices, resentments, and anti-values of some groups, with discourses that appeal to polarization and social division and never to union; hatred and never to peaceful coexistence, to quick and easy analyses and solutions for complex and serious social problems, to nationalism, distrust in institutions, messianism, and authoritarianism. They never appeal to consensus.

The populist divides in order to win. He confronts and blames the past and others for his ineffectiveness. Full of fears that devolve into repression, he does not govern for everyone but for those who – out of convenience or fear – applaud and flatter him. He

builds around himself the kingdom of power for power's sake, not for service. He builds a kingdom of mediocrity, ineptitude, deceitful rhetoric, censorship, etc.

Today's populists emerge in democracies and, once in power, erode them until they transform the regime towards authoritarianism. This transformation... depends on the institutional strength that surrounds them". (De la Torre y Peruzzotti cited by Eduardo Posada Carbó – El Tiempo.cm – January 16, 2025). Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo, a Spanish MP, in a speech to the students of the University of La Libertad in Mexico, said that today, like water or electricity, "truth is a basic necessity." To confront everything that threatens the best of our social coexistence, to confront lies, post-truths, and politicking, to confront all forms of populism, it falls to all of us – against indifference and apathy – to act and participate in all possible and available spaces of social and political life. Voting is not enough, as there are many anti-democratic government regimes in which people also vote very frequently.

It is up to all of us to seek the political leadership of the most capable and intelligent, the most honest, and those who pursue the defense, commitment, and respect of human, social, and democratic values.

It is up to all of us to choose between truth and lies, modesty and spectacle, altruism and egomania, authority and authoritarianism, civility and despotism, union and polarization, freedom and servility, critical spirit and censorship, social order and chaos and anarchy, social construction and moral degradation, the good of all and the benefit and exploitation of a few, between good sense, reason, and common sense and madness and insanity.

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