

## Agenda for the New Century

“If humanity wants to have a recognizable future, it cannot be through the prolongation of the past or the present. If we try to construct the third millennium on these bases, we will fail. And the price of this failure, that is, the alternative for a changed society, is darkness.”<sup>1</sup> With these words, Eric Hobsbawm closed his book *The Age of Extremes*, a sober and brilliant reflection on the twentieth century, and led us to a worrisome question. Change is necessary given the evident problems that humanity confronts, but we are lacking a model to guide our changes.

The problems we face are easy to identify. First, absolute poverty is still the principal challenge for most of humanity and we are a long way from establishing the social bases necessary for everyone to have the minimum conditions of a decent existence. For the huge majority of the world’s population, education, health, and secure shelter are distant dreams. Developed societies confront the reality of structural unemployment. More than simply an economic given, this represents a dramatic social condition insofar as it affects confidence in the future for many people, especially the youth.

The rich and the poor worlds interact through migration, but in place of solidarity this has led to isolationism, exclusion, and xenophobia. Rapid population growth, linked to an absence of sustainable development projects, threatens the global environment, and once again it is poor populations who suffer the most. In the long term, if we are unable to propose and introduce effective change, our own prospects for life on Earth will be endangered. The drug problem is expanding and becoming more than a problem of policing; we may be faced with a social disease with profound roots.

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The international economic system reveals onerous instabilities for all nations, and many problems, such as the volatility of international capital flows, do not have simple solutions. In the political sphere, even though the end of the Cold War has cleared the horizon, we still have not arrived at a broad consensus that will permit efficient and lasting solutions for many crises and regional conflicts.

If identifying problems is easy, as in this list of examples, the difficulty begins when one looks for alternative ways to overcome them and to distance oneself from the "darkness." Can we be optimistic? Are there real possibilities of truly global solutions to the problems I have mentioned? Moreover, if we know that many of these problems are dramatic, some in the short term (such as poverty) and others in the long term (such as the environment), why do they appear to lack those mobilizing elements that induce new attitudes and "force" societies to find effective solutions?

In Brazil, the problems of a developed society are added to the problems of a society that is poor and unjust. We must simultaneously push to modernize our productive sector, maintaining competitiveness and generating employment, and put in place systems that ensure universal access to education, health, and social services. To be sure, coping with marked inequalities is disconcerting; it requires creativity, generosity, and a sense of justice.

Marx said that by analyzing nineteenth-century England, which at the time represented the most advanced example of capitalism, he would be able to shed light on the tendencies of societal evolution. Similarly, as Brazil is still a divided society with obvious contrasts, perhaps we have our own original perspective for understanding what is happening in the world and what is necessary to transform it. In fact, in my list of problems, the theme of inequality always recurs, be it in the form of social contrast, ethnic conflict, or contrasting perspectives in the face of international processes.

I want to say up front that I am not a pessimist. I have affirmed that our age can be transformed into a "New Renaissance." And to structure my reflections, I come back to an important legacy of the twentieth century: the conflict between socialists and liberals. If, like Hobsbawm, we do not wish to simply repeat the past, it is best to understand it well. Here, I do not wish to take up again a comparison between the two systems, but rather call attention to an aspect that, in my mind, is crucial in orienting the change that we strive for: values.

Marx's contributions to the understanding of capitalism were numerous. However, his most profound theoretical contribution has been to link the process of social transformation to an ethical proposition of profoundly egalitarian character. Various aspects of reality—economics, politics, and the world of values—are interconnected and form an intelligible whole, with laws of movement that point in a certain direction in the future. The recognition that the social whole is contradictory, dialectic, and overdetermined by relations to the modes of production will not draw us away from understanding the sense of change, which would necessarily bring greater equality.

When socialism is converted, however, into an ideological form in political regimes, this dialectical understanding of reality is lost. We know that the defect of

socialism, and the cause of its downfall, was the incapacity of regimes both to grow in a sustainable manner and to be responsive to the ideals of equality. Economic growth stalled because socialist regimes did not realize that freedom, the uncontrolled circulation of ideas and information, is a necessary ingredient for development. The values and ethical objectives failed because ideas ossified and lost vitality. This cracked the legitimacy of regimes, both because they were creating new modalities of inequality (within socialist states and between them) and because individual liberty was underestimated as a value that is necessary and essential in its own right for the affirmation of citizens.

Liberal ideological solutions, on the other hand, that did not have the coherence that socialism had as its starting point, became more consistent over the long term. The combination of the market, individual liberties, and democracy resulted from a historical construction. From whence come the varieties of formulas for "real capitalism," which includes everything from the individualist forms, of the Anglo-Saxon world, to the state-society linkages of the Japanese model, which are affirmed in Asia. The market economy became ever more malleable. Its dynamism, foreseen by Marx, was notable, above all because it encountered political conditions of progress, provided essentially by democratic regimes. It is important to recall that, contrary to socialism, market economies admit different social solutions to ethical issues. More clearly, the market has political requirements, such as individual liberty, but does not automatically generate uniform models of social coexistence. This accounts for the distance between the social-democratic and neoliberal models under the same rubric of "market economy." The latitude for choice in structuring social solutions is broad. When we speak of this choice, we are speaking of values, or of an ethical orientation.

This contrast between the failure of real socialism and the varieties of real capitalism is still very alive, and I believe that we have yet to learn its lessons on how to orient our behavior as we face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Insofar as solutions dictated by the logic of the market are seen as triumphant and ideologically hegemonic, we run the risk of attributing to the market something that it is not capable of offering: the capacity to generate models of social coexistence and political orientation. In other words, in wanting to attribute to the market virtues that it does not possess, we can commit the error of uprooting the economy from the social realm, and (this is most grave) of reducing politics to the art of "preserving" the potential of the market.

However, the experience of real socialism revealed that the implementation of an egalitarian ideal, while necessary, is an insufficient criterion of good governance. Ideals that cannot be effectively realized lose their legitimacy. They disorient and become an inverted mirror, in the classic form of ideological expression, showing not what society can reach, but what the structures of domination "pretend" to offer. One of the advantages of democracy is precisely that it has increasingly effective mechanisms to evaluate the direction and efficiency of government. In a certain way, politics today has the possibility of being anchored in reality, and this is an undeniable gain of our times. Ideology, in the Marxist conception, can be replaced with a real dispute about ideas and ideals.

Thus, combining efficiency and equity is a worthy objective. The difficulty is precisely in identifying those parameters that assure that, after starting with an impulse toward efficiency, equity may also be obtained. I would even say that there is a measure of consensus when we speak of broad objectives of transformation, but that this is lost when we come to discuss methods of realizing them, as localized interests then begin to be affected by the change.

With regard to the distance between consensus about objectives and the dispute about methods, recent examples of Brazilian reality may be illustrative. The critiques made of the program of national stabilization, the Real Plan (*Plano real*), above all by economists on the left, were that while the plan may be efficient, it would never be equitable. These critics do not identify, in their ideological repertoire, economic stability as a value of interest to the majority of the population. Moreover, in considering the process of stabilization, they focus not so much on stability, but on the risks of recession. But what happened was just the opposite: the biggest beneficiaries of stability were the poorest of the Brazilian population. Another example is social security, which is a universal problem today, given the financial crisis of the states. Measures that may appear "unjust, albeit efficient" for many, especially when they think exclusively of the short term, can mean more balanced benefits in the long term.

The need to account for both efficiency and equity, in the long and short terms, is not simple, and cannot be satisfied through preconceived formulas. It rather constitutes a path and a set of values. It is necessary, therefore, to transform these values into effective parameters for social change. These would be, in my view, some of the essential lessons of the period that we lived, in which my generation was formed for intellectual and political life.

Why do I now speak of a "New Renaissance"? The Renaissance had numerous philosophical and historical implications. One of the most fundamental was to give to individuals the notion that they could control their own fate. The Renaissance Man came to feel, on the one hand, abandoned, since he was missing the certainty of hierarchies created by religion; on the other hand, he came to feel stronger despite this, because in the end he was the master of his own destiny. Nothing expresses this better than the transformations in the modes of scientific investigation, which became free and limitless, the liberation of politics from religious constraints, courtesy of Machiavelli, and above all changes in the visual arts. The truly dramatic shift from static iconography toward movement and perspective was a clear signal of a new "worldview."

The Renaissance also coincided with a new consciousness of the "dimensions of the world" brought about by a sequence of discoveries. The Renaissance thus foretold the Enlightenment that would in turn create a certain tranquil confidence in the progress of humanity through the advance of reason.

Today, certainly, artistic expressions also suggest a new epoch. Not through the "discovery" of techniques of representation (like new pictorial perspectives), as in the Renaissance. In a certain manner, the vanguards of the twentieth century already demonstrated the infinite capacity of artistic invention of contemporary man, to such a point that today we can say there exists an "aesthetic exhaustion" resulting

from the excess of experimentalism. The novelty in the arts is rather along the lines of what was foreseen by Benjamin. New technologies support ever more perfect and infinite forms, multiplying artistic possibilities. To give an example that caught my attention, I received a few days ago a perfect reproduction of a painting by a great Brazilian painter done by copying the original with a scanner. Such technological possibilities will certainly have some impact on the very progress of artistic creation, and it will also hugely democratize our access to cultural goods. The arts are sending us an important signal. It is as if there is a tacit announcement, in harmony with that of the Renaissance, of how much we can do. There is, however, a fundamental difference in relation to the Renaissance: the sentiment of liberty is not built upon ideal models of a past civilization, like the Greco-Roman era for the Italians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but it has value in itself. It is a challenge that recalls a feeling of abandonment for many, because the liberty of creation today no longer corresponds to an aesthetic model that serves as a pattern and reference.

It is appropriate that, in mentioning these arts, I have accentuated what they have offered to science and to technology. In fact, everyone recognizes that the core of the contemporary process of transformation lies in scientific and technological diffusion, coupled with the infinite expansion of forms of communication. We are confronted with an era of discovery and advances that create powerful forces of social and economic transformation. The speed and the novelty of technological offerings create a sort of wonderment with the powers not only of technology, but also of the market. We can do so much. Perhaps the stock of scientific and technological knowledge is now sufficient to alleviate some of the chronic problems of our time, such as hunger and absolute poverty. But what can we do to ensure that this knowledge serves humanity, and that it not exacerbates inequalities?

One of the risks we run is precisely that of transferring to the impersonal market the "responsibility" of creating and adapting oneself to the new times. We know, as I pointed out, about the advantages of the market as a generator of wealth and creativity. We also know that the market is based on certain values, like liberties, but that they are insufficient to set an agenda of social coexistence. If the market reigned supreme, there would be, as perhaps in the domain of aesthetics, a sentiment of profound abandonment. And the idea of alienation, in the Marxist sense of the word, would return, as we would be confronted with forces of our own creation that we do not know how to control.

The absence of a more dialectical debate on the objectives of the market and liberty could cause them to lose the mobilizing virtues they have had and rather lead to a crisis of values. In fact, what are missing now are no longer religious certainties, but ideological certainties that, for better or worse, gave us the ethical impulse for change. The existence of an alternative model of society, in turn, put the market economy on the defensive and generated movements for transformation and betterment. It is not by chance that Hobsbawm affirms, in the most dialectic spirit that "Capitalism only survived to show its superior capacity because of socialism."

In sum, man lives with possibilities of "rebirth," a new liberty to reinvent models of social coexistence. The models are still in the process of being defined, and

in the present stage point more to limits to what should not be done than to positive patterns.

Another contemporary phenomenon engendered by technological progress that reinforces the thesis of the "New Renaissance" is that of globalization, which is producing a new consciousness of the dimensions of the world. Events everywhere affect nearly all the various aspects of our lives. The Renaissance established the individual as subject, and with the retreat of religious interference in politics, left the terrain open for the definition of a new model of social organization, the sovereign state. Now, the advance of globalization designates "humanity as the new subject," and in a certain way, that very same state is obliged to adapt itself to new circumstances. This powerful notion of a "global community" is altering our worldview and, as a consequence, that of leaders in government, which can no longer see problems simply through a national lens. Solidarity is becoming an exigency that does not result only from the ethical conscience of peoples. The UN Global Conferences, in coping with themes such as the environment, human rights, population, women, urban problems, and social development, reveal clearly that the world of politics is one of conflicts and contradictions, and is no longer contained by national boundaries.

However, the result of this process is not straightforward. If the new agenda is universal in theme, it will not be so—as, for example, during the Cold War—by virtue of any organizing theme. When we think of possibilities for effective transformation, we are obliged to weave arguments that are universal, but that can have different patterns. There does not exist, as Marx proposed, a conflict that is central, unifying, and of transnational character. The processes will necessarily be complex. We do have, however, an advantage over the globalization of the Renaissance. This is the difference in cultural hierarchizations, or the ideology of the civilizational superiority of the West. Today, after anthropology has debunked this myth of superiority, globalization makes clear that problems effectively belong to everyone. "National" responsibilities for solutions can still differ, but the consciousness that problems belong to humanity, and that they ask for the participation of all, is an indisputable gain. A clear institutional expression of this tendency is the exhaustion of the national state as a provider of solutions for economic and social questions. The importance of the so-called new actors—be they NGOs or multilateral organizations—can be summed up in the recognition by the state that innovative institutional solutions are necessary for the challenges of the present. Regional integration is the principal example of the configuration of a new structure of relations between states.

Thus, it is not only the feeling of abandonment that marks the entrance into the twenty-first century. The analogy with the Renaissance is useful because we are faced with unique opportunities for positive changes for humanity that deliver us from "darkness." The capacity to create wealth that the technological advance provides us is incredible, almost limitless. An eloquent example is that of agriculture: in the United States, a relatively small percentage of the active population generates a great percentage of the global food output.

We know today, with clarity, that progress and economic growth are insufficient and empty if they are not oriented by values like respect for human rights, ecology,

and a better distribution of wealth. Conceptually, I would say that we are prepared to make a qualitative leap, in terms of one of the central problems of humanity, which is that of social justice. What is lacking, then, is the control of the political arts needed to establish equitable forms of growth.

Would we have to reformulate Marx and inquire if the progress of social justice will be hampered by outdated modalities of the appropriation of wealth? From the point of view of government action, how can we reconcile an economic model that is essentially concentrated in rents (given that forms of production are ever more capital intensive) with social policies with compensatory effects? How can we cope with the problem of structural unemployment, which results from the change of the technological cycle?

With the experience of real socialism past, we know that it will not be through the radical transformation of the system of property rights that we will gain efficiency and equity (partly because private property was democratized through the ever greater presence of private pension funds as investors). We also know there will not be an exclusive route for radical and definitive transformations, as classical Marxism would want. The project of revolutionary transformation, we can say without fear, is void.

We are thus faced with two challenges. The first is in the realm of ideas and values: What societies do we want and what are the possibilities for approximating equality between social groups and nations? The second is in the concrete plans for change: How can we channel the potential of the new technological cycle for creating wealth into creating more social justice?

In a certain manner, the ideals of change are being defined negatively, or rather as a counterpoint to the visible problems that the modern world has engendered. We want growth compatible with an increase in employment and equity; we want our concerns with human rights and the environment to be respected; we want a more stable international system, and better decision-making processes; we want greater predictability in the future; we want minorities to be included; and so on. To illustrate this repertoire of ideals, I recall that, in every final document of the large UN conferences, there are consensual solutions on what humanity wants. And it is symptomatic of the new times to turn to "negotiated" documents to expose objectives common to our societies. We know, however, that the central problem is succeeding in mobilizing these ideas, so that they do not serve merely as distant ethical or rhetorical references.

It is exactly because these ideas are not incorporated immediately into a "universal" class struggle, as in the Marxist model, that its weight as a mobilizing asset is tenuous. Thus, in the same way that a fragmentation of objectives exists, there also exists a fragmentation of modes of action. This is a fundamental parameter for the governments that assume the ethical commitment to bring to their people a more just third millennium.

In closing this reflection, I would like to pass from these generic notes, which are necessarily abstract, to a more concrete point on my agenda. I would like to touch on the dynamic of transformation. In many cases, as with human rights and ecology, the

social actors that drive the struggle for values are articulated. However, in my view, one of the central objectives of the process of transformation is changing the state. It is fundamental that the state change, so that it may become an agent of change.

Many types of states exist, and their capacities for action are different. But I think that, despite the forces of globalization and despite the partly correct hypotheses about the weakening—or better yet, insufficiency—of the nation-state, the fact is that they yet must be studied as the decisive instrument in the project of transformations.

In this sense, one must first take care to avoid attributing to the state conditions that it has lost through historical change. It is impossible to resurrect the developmentalist state of 1960s Latin America. The state in the twenty-first century will not have the central role in investment. The majority of capital resources are now disseminated in an impersonal financial system through transnational corporations. However, there will not be investment if the state does not know how to complete its tasks of macroeconomic “vigilance,” if it is not a stable reference point for private economic agents, and if it is not capable of efficaciously exercising its regulatory and strategic planning functions.

The freedom to invest, and the fact that private enterprises are now providing traditional public services, demands extraordinary caution to prevent abusive forms of oligopoly and disrespect of the consumer. A second objective is to strengthen the democratic sense of political action that, in reality, is a condition for positive-action as much in the economic realm—democracy must perfect its mechanisms for defending the consumer—as in the social. The decision process will be both more effective and more legitimate the more it is permeated by social demands that, as we have seen, fragment within national societies. The processes of classic representation must be complemented by something that political theory has not yet defined with clarity, which is representation by direct participation. I do not wish to return, as the men of the Renaissance did, to Greek models. Such models do not serve for complex societies like ours. I know that one of the greatest challenges of our time, as it was in the Renaissance, is to reinvent politics, but in a way contrary to that of Machiavelli. That is, by using participation to reinstall the world of values and ethics in the corridors of power.

I reaffirm my conviction of optimism with regard to the future. It is within our reach to utilize the extraordinary potential of contemporary science and technology to see structural changes in our societies through to completion, in such a way as to stimulate solidarity between peoples and nations and to fix the foundations of a more just and prosperous world. With the courage and the vision that guided the men of the Renaissance, we will be able to succeed in the consolidation of a better world, one more just than that which we were given.

#### NOTE

1. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).