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After the pandemic

"We need to invent a collective re-appropriation"

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This week *l'Humanite* (newspaper of the French Communist Party) has been asking representatives of the left about their vision for the "day after" Today we interview Olivier Besancenot, of the NPA, who argues for a "shock of solidarity".

How does the crisis that we are going through demonstrate the need to break with the current system?

Olivier Besancenot: It is now a question of survival. We could already sense how the liberal globalization phase of the past 30 years - a promise of stability for the financial markets - had reached its limits. Even globalized, capitalism has finished going round the world. It is not a bottomless pit. We saw it with the financial crisis of 2008, with the climate crisis and now with the health crisis. The system is dramatically confronted with its own contradictions. But, to use Walter Benjamin's formula, capitalism will never die a natural death. The challenge is to help it. Because the day after can, if we don't stop them, be worse than the day before.

How can the bill for the coming economic crisis not be presented to citizens?

Olivier Besancenot: The question is - who will have control over the production model in the world afterwards? A collective and public re-appropriation needs to be invented, in particular so that industry responds to social needs. It is not simply a question of reversing the privatization of public services, but of expropriating the private interests of certain sectors which are too important to be left to the crazy logic of the market economy. This logic now consists of forcing Airbus employees to manufacture war helicopters, while being unable to requisition a company, Luxfer, which is the only one able to manufacture oxygen cylinders. Otherwise, the workers, the oppressed, the exploited will surely pay a heavy social bill. This is what is already starting with paid holidays and weekly working hours. The ecological consequences will also be catastrophic because the race for growth will resume. At the political level, liberal governments are already considering the strategy of shock to impose unpopular measures. Authoritarianism is only the flip side of the capitalist coin. There must be a shock of solidarity.

This shock of solidarity, through what measures will it concretely happen?

Olivier Besancenot: The day after begins now. The priority, particularly financial, must be given to solidarity. Starting with health services. without delay, we have to make more beds available, take on the thousands of extra staff that are needed, get the protective equipment. The gap between what is promised and what is vitally necessary is intolerable. Just for the EHPAD (care homes for the elderly), we would need 2 million masks a day. Not to mention, in addition to the caregivers, all those whose work remains essential. The immediate challenge is to ensure that billions of public euros - taxpayers' money, therefore ours – are used for the health emergency. If we let them go to big business and the banks, they will be lost forever to the world afterwards. The government does not perceive the anger, silent but serious, that is welling up. To imagine for a single second that we could function as before with the dismantling of public health services, transport, education, social security, etc., is inconceivable. The government itself recognizes that the economic system will face a systemic crisis. It is admitting its flaws. This. from a government which, a few weeks ago, invited, with its pension reform, the private insurance companies to take the place of our solidarity-based system.

This crisis demonstrates the concentration of power. What democratic ruptures are necessary?

Olivier Besancenot: It starts by lifting here and now the emergency law which allows the executive to govern by

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ordinances and decrees and to concentrate even more its power. At the political level, we are coming to a crossroads: either the temptation of the iron fist on the part of the ruling classes, or, on the contrary, the invention of a society that operates from the bottom up. This implies ending, among other things, the Fifth Republic and overhauling, in a constituent process, all democratic rules. But also changing things in the workplaces. Workers in both the public and private sectors have practically no say. The health crisis shows, for example, how they are best placed to know what protection they need.

After the historic social movement of this winter, how can we build the relationship of forces necessary for a "day after" that goes in the direction of progress?

Olivier Besancenot: If we hope for policies that impose a shock of solidarity and emancipatory, egalitarian, ecological policies, we must first be able to stop the steamroller of liberal and authoritarian policies. So, let all social, political and trade-union forces be united once and for all.

Interviewed by Julia Hamlaoui for [l'Humanité](#) 7 April 2020.

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