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# DAVOS, THE POPE AND THE MISSING PART OF REALITY

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## THE NOTEWORTHY NON-ELITE

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In Davos the air is filled with optimism in 2014. The great post-2008 crisis is seen already as outdated matter to be archived in the history books and in the drawers of sad memories of families and peoples. **Too bad that this optimism does not have a solid foundation one could build on.** So the key question becomes: why would Davos want to offer the public a picture of the economy other than what the vast majority of the people have so vividly in mind?

The answer can be found on the list of the protagonists of the "*World Economic Forum*" which is composed of leaders of world finance and major transnational lobbies, with representatives of the political and economic institutions that perform essentially the role of spectators and sometimes customers. **The elites whose representativeness is very low.** Capitalist economy is not a democratic enterprise: voting is not by the heads but by capital. In symposia such as this the reality of what **Federico Caffè** described a few decades ago becomes tangible, namely that markets are not anonymous - in fact they have "*a name, a surname and a nickname, too*".

Of course, some optimism is definitely needed to understand, that is, to realise that **for these elites** and for the people represented by them as natural persons and legal entities, **economy is not doing that bad after all.** Actually, it is doing quite well. Once the not-too-remote bankruptcy of the global financial system of a few years ago has been averted (temporarily), there's a whole **speculative finance** which continues to reap profits from its business and, above all, some **golden annuities**. To understand what is really happening in Davos, we should interpret it together with the report presented by **Oxfam** a few days ago (**Working for the few**). It states, inter alia, that the eighty-five super-rich of the world possess the equivalent of what is owned by one half of the world's population. These eighty-five, and with them a few million people now scattered in almost all countries (in India the number of billionaires shows a ten-fold increase in the past ten years), are very well represented in Davos. **All the rest is who are not there.** It isn't surprising that among them we find great numbers of the "extreme poor", many of whom are the inhabitants of the African continent devastated by quite a few of the multinationals that today, among the Swiss mountains, make a fine show of their social budgets. But also many European families can be listed here, impoverished by a crisis likely to have been unprecedented save for the one that occurred at the beginning of the industrial revolution.

A second reason for this strange "optimism of the few" is linked to **the increasing distance between the representatives meeting in Davos and the lives of ordinary people**, especially the poor. What do these elites know about the life of a family in a village in South Sudan, or of a European family with one spouse unemployed, having two or three small children? Practically nothing. One of the most serious diseases of this generation of capitalism is **the total separation between the top managers** of large companies, banks and mutual funds (and often also of global humanitarian organizations) **and the common people**. When those who govern no longer feel the smell of people queuing in the shops or travelling in the metro, in regional trains, then these powerful people cannot tell any more whether they are governing and managing people or machines, souls or centres of costs and revenues. **Today the public transport means** and the average city traffic (not the one of the cars with sirens nor that of private helicopters) are **the primary venues for practicing citizenship**, and it is in these places that we understand its paradoxes and its value. Sooner or later the social contract is broken if we all do not breathe in the same smells of life, the bad ones and the good ones, too.

With his message the Pope wanted to convey a cry of alarm on behalf of the non-elites to these elites who are risking to lose touch with the real places of social life. The biggest risk, however, is that this important warning is received like that of the director in the theatre in a story narrated by Søren Kierkegaard: "*The director of a theatre comes on stage to warn the audience that a fire broke out. However, the audience thinks that his appearance is part of the comedy they are watching and so the louder he shouts, the more they applaud.*" For the words of Francis to bring fruit, it would take other Forums, in which the poor and the representatives of the peripheral countries excluded from Davos can tell other stories on this financial capitalism - with the politicians and the powerful just sitting quietly and listening to them.

The most obvious venue for such a different Forum would be Pope Francis' Rome, for he is the only one in possession of the authority and credibility to bring everybody together around himself. The new economy that many wish for, the one that would overthrow the current views and protagonists will be inevitably arriving if our point of departure is from the poor and from the suburbs. An immense reality that today is the "*the least among the cities*".

*Translated by Eszter Kató*