

The voice of Maria Dolens

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE PEACE BELL FOUNDATION OF ROVERETO

Attack the US with the US flag

I would like to dedicate my monthly reflection to an event of great importance, with regard to both politics and the media, which took place on the day of the Epiphany in Washington.

All of us have, I believe, accompanied with growing disbelief and horror the images, conveyed in real time by TV networks all over the world, of the absurd violence that transpired from a wild crowd of "supremacists" on one of the symbolic institutions of the United States, the Congress, called in those hours to confirm the Democratic candidate Joe Biden in the presidential elections on 2 November.

The Commissions of Inquiry (and, later, the historians) will have the task of examining the causes and accountability concerning what happened on that dramatic 6 January. The outgoing president (in the meantime subjected to a humiliating "impeachment" procedure) was unable to accept the clear verdict of the polls. Did he or did he not convey an ambiguous message to his loyalists, urging them to "make themselves heard" by Congress? Did the administrative and police authorities responsible for the security of the Capitol at first underestimate the degree of threat from the mobsters? Furthermore, as the demonstration was underway was their illegal entry into the building actually even favored? In both cases, the more than likely answer is "yes", but this is not enough to explain the reasons for such delusional collective behavior, also taking into account the fact that the attackers were not Islamic fundamentalists wishing to disseminate terror once more in the West, but proud Americans. As further confirmation



Caption Jake Angeli, the "Shaman" who led the revolt against Congress

of such pride, the vandalism of Capitol Hill took place amidst an ostentatious brandishing of flags and banners with stars and stripes.

A possible explanation could consist in the firm conviction of the demonstrators concerning the electoral scam on a national scale of which President Trump was supposedly a victim, reinforced by the speeches of the then occupant of the White House and the supporting press which was combined with the resolve to no longer recognize Congress as one of the legitimate centers of established power. However, it is an interpretation that cannot find any basis, if we consider the presence of consolidated and transparent electoral procedures as well as free information organs with immediate access to all in the United States.

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WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

Bread and Peace

THE DIRECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL STABILITY AND FOOD SECURITY

Many children go to bed without dinner even though they have not been in trouble. Sometimes they even skip lunch. Never mind breakfast. Their parents are normal people who only want the best for their children. The best though, in some areas of the world, simply means getting two meals a day and clean water. It doesn't matter if it's hot as long as it's safe to drink. It seems obvious in our country where the main problem is obesity but it is not so for the nearly 700 million people who go to bed every day on an empty stomach.

They would gladly work if they had a piece of land to cultivate and water to irrigate it. With even more enthusiasm if in the meantime no one bombed them or if an anti-personnel mine placed by some armed group to stop the advance of child soldiers did not explode with each movement of their hoe. They would work but they can't because there is shooting all around.

If you don't work, you don't eat. If you don't eat, you don't think and so after a while you are willing to do anything, even to fight, to besiege cities and to chase away hungry people like yourself. It's a vicious circle, because



even those who run away don't have enough food, and if they run and find a rifle, they pick it up and then ... if you don't have dinner to give your child, you shoot.

War and hunger go hand in hand. Nearly 60 percent of people who do not eat regularly live in areas where armed conflict occurs. And it is precisely the clashes between opposing

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countries or factions that represent the greatest obstacle to achieving “Zero Hunger”, the second of the seventeen goals set by the international community in 2015 in order to work towards the achievement of sustainable development by 2030. We are running very late and we are not dealing with it enough as malnutrition is not at the center of the political agenda in areas where the problem is being overweight. In particular, there is little commitment to promoting sustainable agriculture. The World Food Programme is focusing on this and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 precisely because it works on bread and water, the two main tools to be used in order to stop wars.

But the road is long because, in addition to those who do not eat at all, there are also those who live in a regime of acute food insecurity. In 2019 135 million individuals, distributed in 55 countries, were afflicted by this problem. Even more people, one in three, suffer from some form of malnutrition. The repercussions are very serious. The lack of food not only affects the health of individuals, but also slows down the economic progress and education of all. If you are poor and cannot even study the possibilities of improving your living con-

ditions are reduced to almost zero. It is difficult to struggle to increase the income of your family and live with peace of mind without hating anyone because you think they are taking away something that belongs to you. Limited resources means more wars, and it is for this reason that assistance to those trapped in areas of armed conflict, to those living under siege or to those fleeing after abandoning their house destroyed by the bombing, is not only solidarity, but also a step towards Peace, a way to give hope and alleviate further tensions that could quickly turn into new clashes.

Hunger and war are Siamese twins, the kind that no surgeon can separate. Either you fight them together or you get sucked into a vortex with no way out. "Conflicts can cause food insecurity and hunger, just as hunger and food insecurity can ignite latent conflicts and trigger violence", expressed the Norwegian Nobel Committee in the motivation for the prize awarded to the World Food Programme. And unfortunately it's not even a new thing because we already knew about it. It is written in black and white in the Resolution 2417 of the United Nations Security Council, adopted in May

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Lack of food not only affects health but also slows economic progress and education

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2018, which maintains that without a general ceasefire the world will never be able to solve the problem of nutrition. The same text prohibits the use of hunger as a weapon of war, banning the hateful practice based on the siege of entire populations who are prevented from accessing food supplies to exhaust the fighters and convince them to surrender. This too is old history. From Troy onwards there have been hundreds of besieged cities. For more than two thousand years, Homer has told us that in the end they all

lose, but it was not enough. Charlie Chaplin also tried in his final speech in *"The Great Dictator"*, but the *"Iliad"* is long and the cinemas are closed.

The fact remains that there are many areas at risk and inadequate funding to counter the crisis. In 2018, when famine was looming in Yemen international intervention averted the worst but today millions of people in various areas of the country once again risk starvation. The same happens in other nations afflicted by conflict such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria or South Sudan. The preliminary results of research conducted jointly by the World Food Programme and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute highlight the fact that even in El Salvador, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan and Mali there is a huge risk if an improvement in access to natural resources does not come about soon. There is need for water to irrigate, land to cultivate, clean air to breathe and fire, not that of weapons but that of the kitchen. The elements to defeat the war have always been the same for centuries. Homer already claimed this three thousand years ago. He was blind but some things he was certainly able to see.



URBAN VIOLENCE

Another name for war

If your country declares war on someone you should at least know about it. That's how it was in the past. Diplomats exchanged papers, heads of state gave motivational speeches, occasionally from a balcony. The generals said they had expected it, the soldiers obeyed, the people cheered. The difference between conflict and peace was clear. After seeing dreams of glory shattered on the coffins of their children mothers then began to protest. Gasoline was not found, bread was scarce, a black market was organized, maintenance of the tanks was

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In many emerging economies, organized crime has replaced the armed insurrection as the main challenge to the state

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Graffiti from the 1950s in Harlem demonstrates the presence of street gangs even at that time

interrupted, various territories were invaded and the most intelligent launched an appeal for an end to the hostilities. It was clear-cut. Tragic, repetitive, but clear.

Today this is no longer the case. Or at least that's not all. There are cities in the world where the boundary between criminal violence and armed conflict has been drastically reduced, where the distinction between war and peace is imperceptible. The big drug traffickers, for example, have real armies, they build impregnable fortresses, they give "jobs" to a part of the population, sometimes they shoot each other but above all they kill anyone who puts their nose in their business. Even the way in which we speak about conflict has changed and the word "war" is increasingly accompanied by specific phenomena such as terrorism or drug trafficking. The use of the term is not entirely inappropriate if we consider to be true the fact that in many Latin American countries the violence of the so-called street gangs is comparable to the atrocities of the civil wars of the past.

There is more. According to Kieran Mitton, who teaches International Relations at the King's College Department of War Studies in London, "the repressive responses provided by police, military and city authorities, often poorly equipped to deal with phenomena of this magnitude in urban settings, have led to an extreme situation. This vicious circle has therefore alienated local communities,

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There are cities in the world where the distinction between conflict and peace is imperceptible

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distancing them from the police force and fueling the problem of crime control. In Brazil, for example, many of the residents of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro are more afraid of being killed by gunshots fired by the police than actual drug traffickers."

Populations do not always have the perception of being involved in an armed conflict, although some scholars argue that crime has replaced insurrection as the main challenge to the state. Perhaps we should begin to see organized crime as the equivalent of an invading army. The alternative is to agree with Leonard Cohen when he sings "there is a war between those who say there is a war and those who say there is not".

HAPPENING AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Norwegian Bjørn Berge is the new Deputy Secretary General



Bjørn Berge, elected as Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Mr Bjørn Berge (Norway) was elected today by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) as the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe by 185 votes to 112 for the other candidate, Mrs Leyla Kayacik (Turkey). He will take up office on 1 March 2021 for a period of five years. Mr Berge is a Norwegian diplomat. He obtained a M.A. in International Relations at the Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) - Johns Hopkins University (Washington D.C., USA). He also holds a B.A. in International Relations at the Concordia College (Moorhead, Minnesota, USA).

Prior to his election to the post of Deputy Secretary General he was notably Director General and Secretary to the Committee of Ministers (since February 2017), as well as Director of the Private Office of the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2009-2017). He has been Senior Adviser at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2008) and at the OSCE Chairmanship Unit (1998-2000), as well as for the Norwegian Department for International Affairs. He replaces the Italian Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni who has served as the Council of Europe's Deputy Secretary General since September 2012 and was re-elected in June 2015. Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni worked for a long time at the Council of Europe. She was notably Director General of Programmes (2011-2012), Director General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport (2004-2011) and Director General of Social Cohesion.

As the number 2 of the Organization, Mr Berge shall act as the permanent deputy of the Secretary General (the Croatian Marija Pejčinović Burić) in all matters, in supervision of all departments of the Secretariat, except the Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as replace the Secretary General and undertake all her duties and responsibilities when she is absent or otherwise unavailable. During the Session, the Parliamentary Assembly has also elected as Secretary General of the Assembly: Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, for a five-year term starting on 1 March 2021. She is the first woman to hold the post in PACE's 72-year history. Giuseppe Zaffuto, portavoce del Consiglio d'Europa per l'Italia.

Giuseppe Zaffuto, spokesperson for the Council of Europe in Italy.



Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, first woman elected as Secretary General of the Assembly

HAPPENING AT THE UN

Fraternity and Social Justice

THE WORLD DAYS OF 4 AND 20 FEBRUARY

As long as Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyib do it everything is normal, but if the invitation to consider your neighbor as a brother comes from the UN a religious question becomes cultural and political. Episodes of violence inspired by religious hatred have been on the rise since the pandemic began. This fact highlights how aversion towards others is directly proportional to economic and social difficulties. We feel insecure because the salary does not arrive, the bar in which we have invested all our savings is closed, the ski lifts are frozen, the hotel is empty and theaters are deserted. Valid reasons to be worried, even angry. Good reasons to ask for political transformation, radical changes of direction, greater firmness or more flexibility. All that is wished for and

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Episodes of violence inspired by religious hatred have increased sharply since the start of the pandemic

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considered useful, but the “unbelievers” have nothing to do with it. It is not their fault. Yet the attacks which stem from intolerance towards those who profess a different faith are increasing in this period faster than the value of Bitcoin, so much so that, as we reported in the last issue, even the Council of Europe has recently established the figure of a new special representative responsible for dealing with this issue full time.

Covid has opened a new horizon of convergence between the two religious leaders who signed the document on “Human fraternity for world peace and living together” in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019 and the United Nations Assembly, which announced the International Day of Human Fraternity on the same day exactly two years after the event. The aim is to promote intercultural dialogue and foster mutual knowledge. The period, however, is unfavorable. The economic crisis has exacerbated hearts and souls while lockdown has clouded judgment. Perhaps it is for this reason that the UN promotes the World Day of Social Justice in the same

month of February, on the 20th. Such an initiative is considered an indispensable condition for the achievement and maintenance of Peace and security both within countries and between nations. The UN invites member states to consolidate their efforts to eradicate poverty and promote employment, gender equality and the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants. Fraternity and social justice didn't just come together by chance but they might just trigger a short circuit between values that represent the two sides of the same coin. Social justice is an essential prerequisite for Peace, but also for overcoming hatred of any kind, primarily religious hatred, which is after all the easiest to trigger. Recovering economically also helps us to get closer to our neighbor (the one who has his wife with her face covered by a veil) and to realize that he experiences the crisis with the same difficulties as our cousin (the one with his girlfriend who goes to mass every Sunday).

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The economic revival may also serve to calm the friction between populations

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A piece by the French street artist Combo from the “COEXIST” series



Caption Vasco Gargalo, "Alepponica"

ART AND PEACE

Guernica in Syria

Painting one war is like having painted them all. Especially if you are Picasso.

When the Nazis of the Condor Legion and the fascists of the Italian Legionary Air Force launched Operation Rügen they thought they would be remembered as heroes in the history books. Instead, the bombing of Guernica, which was razed to the ground on April 26, 1937 during the Spanish Civil War, is referred to mainly in lessons on twentieth century art. The tragedy shocked Picasso. For two months the artist worked frantically and came away at the end of this time with the creation of the masterpiece that bears the name of the destroyed city. The same year the work was shown to the world from the Spanish pavilion of the "Exposition Universelle de Paris", the Paris World Fair. Since then, that oil on canvas covering 271.266 square centimeters has become a cry of pain against all wars. This is how art works, in that the detail serves to illuminate the universal.

If Guernica represents and condemns all conflicts, Vasco Gargalo must have thought then that he might help us even

today. This is why the Portuguese illustrator, class of 1977, decided to create *Alepponica*, a piece in which the original figures have been modified to make room for faces and symbols of the conflict in Syria. Therefore, the woman on the run becomes a migrant trying to reach Europe while the horse, which originally represented the Spanish people, has the flag of the United States on its coat. Ghosts become presidents in office and candles become sticks of dynamite. A hand holds a rifle to pay homage to the resistance of the city of Aleppo while the bull, which symbolized fascism, now has the appearance of a long-lived head of state.

Everything has changed except the horror of the war. Even the language has remained the same: direct, clear and immediate, exactly as it should be in a message that is addressed to all. The style is that of Picasso, one of the few in the twentieth century to have been comprehensible without ever falling into banality. Talent was innate, of course, but some things are won over time. Before becoming an artist he was just very good. He told us: "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child".

To be continued on page 1...

By a tragic irony of fate, the fact certainly did not escape us that two of the five victims turned out to be ex-soldiers, with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan at their back. United by the resolution, in those difficult areas of crisis, to defend the interests of their country with pride and determination, they died in the federal capital pursuing opposite objectives, in one case the defense of Congress, in the other its desecration.

With this disturbing scenario in the background, two final considerations seem to stand out:

- a) the total repudiation of the recent violence in Washington recalls, by contrast, the "armed" image of the United States to which we will look with deep and lasting gratitude. That, which is linked to the involvement of the United States in the Second World War, which ended with the liberation of the European continent from the regimes of oppression and tyranny in force up to that moment;
- b) the certainty that the relationship between the United States and the countries of the European Union will continue to represent the backbone of the system of international relations, guaranteeing high levels of democracy, civil liberties and economic progress also to new generations.

For this to happen, the political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic, starting with the new administration in Washington, must never lack skills of competence, responsibility and reliability.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President



IT HAPPENED TODAY

Protest against the Gulf War

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE AT ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS PRAYER MEET



6 February, 1991: Ecumenical and interreligious prayer meeting in protest against the Gulf War



18 February, 1966: The new location of Maria Dolens after the transfer from Rovereto Castle to the Colle di Miravalle (Miravalle Hill)



27 February, 1972: The Bell rings on the tenth anniversary after it was recast possible thanks to the support of the Lions Club of Italy