

Outcome a foregone conclusion in battle between money and happiness

A visit to California is always a special experience, particularly now because of the impending presidential elections. According to customers with a preference for the Republicans whom I spoke to during my last visit, Trump's comments are being overemphasized by the Democrats in the media during the campaign. They also subtly point out that his rival Hillary Clinton is getting away very lightly with her "emailgate". The Trump camp is also warning that taxes in California will approach 70% if Clinton becomes president. At the same time, big companies such as Facebook, Google and Apple, who claim they support the Democrats, use financial structures to pay only a pittance in tax. The Democrats counter that these companies are willing to pay tax, but that the shareholders do not approve because it would be contrary to their interests. Companies could even find themselves being sued for doing so! So, they carry on pursuing the maximization of profits and pay no taxes for the "common good", such as infrastructure. With all the bizarre consequences that this entails. The roads are so poorly maintained that Tesla's self-driving cars cannot drive on them safely. The local water companies are unable to supply clean drinking water. The state would rather add chlorine and fluoride to drinking water than do anything structurally about the water supply itself. The result is that everyone buys huge amounts of drinking water in plastic bottles in the supermarket (where all your other shopping is neatly packed for you in a large number of plastic bags). Meanwhile, life in the ocean off the coast of California is threatened by "plastic soup".

I continue to be amazed at the systems we choose to keep in place. Systems that cause enormous damage to the planet, which we only have on loan from our children. And I have also been astonished at some of the responses to my column about Shell's choice (FD June 10). It is only one of many examples of companies that are still choosing to maximize profits and dividends instead of investing in continuity, in innovation, in sustainable solutions, in the preservation of our planet. It must surely give employers, employees and shareholders more satisfaction to contribute to a company with a mission that matters?

Over the coming decades, a battle will be fought between old and new, between fossil and sustainable, between money and happiness – but the winner is a foregone conclusion. New generations will be the drivers of a sustainable, shareable and reusable economy. Of a new prosperity, based on well-being rather than possessions. Personally, I am quite jealous of the young people who will be able to play a full part in this.

I am afraid that the choice for Trump or for Clinton is not going to make any difference to the future of our planet. But the good news is that we can ultimately all make choices that will influence our own future: we can decide what to put in our shopping cart, we can choose what company we want to work for or invest in and we can choose the leaders who are best able to break away from existing systems. As far as the last choice is concerned, however, the selection is still sadly very limited.

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