Lazare Carnot: the excellence of leadership in times of crisis

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The following speeches were given on Nov. 21, 1998 to a conference of the Schiller Institute in Bad Schwalbach, Germany. The panel was introduced by Mrs. Hellenbroich, a European Executive Committee member of the International Caucus of Labor Committees.

We are presenting to you in this following panel an historical paradox, by focussing our attention on the "ironical" case of one of the greatest military leaders of France—Lazare Carnot (1753-1823). Carnot became known throughout Europe and the U.S.A. as the "Organizer of Victory." In the years after the successful war of independence of the United States against Britain, Carnot, whose most important victories were fought between 1793 and 1797 against an overwhelming coalition of European forces, shaped the destiny of the nation of France. He did this by giving moral leadership, by evoking among the citizens of France a love for the sovereign nation-state, the feeling of being a patriot and a world citizen, whose identity lies in the defense of the inalienable rights of every individual. Against a seemingly invincible force, Carnot set the concept of the superiority of the *creative mind*.

Yet the tragedy is, that this great statesman, military leader, scientist, and poet (he wrote his own poems and translated Friedrich Schiller's "The Glove") was betrayed—a betrayal whose implications historically are still felt to this day. Carnot, in his own words, was "obedient to the Constitution," was "against conquests," and conceived himself as an "archenemy of Robespierre" (Carnot said he had an "evil heart" and "mediocre intelligence"). Carnot was the only one of the French leaders who spoke out publicly against Napoleon's making himself Emperor; he loved and cultivated the sciences and arts, and he "deeply loved his nation"—this man was forced by a political cabal that worked with the British oligarchy, to go into exile in 1816, to the German city of Magdeburg. He came there with the help of a network in Germany, passing through Warsaw, where he was warmly received by the network of Tadeusz Kosciuszko.

Carnot lived in Magdeburg from 1816 until his death in 1823. Ironically, while ignored by his own nation, his creative contributions were transmitted through a network of people who were linked with the Göttingen scientific tradition and the U.S. West Point Military Academy. This, in turn, laid the foundation for a whole new scientific renaissance and industrial revolution in the United States and Europe.

What Andreas Ranke, Dino de Paoli, and Jacques Cheminade will present to you, is unique historical material, never before presented to an audience in this way: On the one side, because the historical truth about Carnot and his European-wide network was distorted or simply suppressed; on the other side, because, as a result of the Second World War, many historical archives were destroyed, such as the military archive in Potsdam.

We will look at Carnot from the standpoint of a lesson about the Socratic principle of leadership and statecraft. We look at it, seeing ourselves as the heirs of the best humanists who lived and shaped civilization's history, our best friends being Eratosthenes, Homer, Plato, Augustine, Leibniz, Rabelais, Schiller, Pushkin, Beethoven, Mickiewicz.

The implicit question embodied in the study we present to you is: How are we future leaders assembled here in this room going to shape the fate of human civilization? We are today faced with a much bigger global financial breakdown crisis today, than any crisis that preceded it in the past centuries. It will inflict many more tragedies than occurred in the entire twentieth century. What kind of responsibility does this put on us? What does this imply, in terms of the community

Lazare Carnot, the head of the revolutionary armies. He became known as the Organizer of Victory, because he mobilized the minds of Frenchmen to save their nation, against the Jacobin rabble-rousers and aristocratic fops-turned-revolutionaries.

of principle of "true sovereign nation-states" which we have to actualize and bring forth in each nation we represent?

The impact of the American Revolution

We shall situate the life and actions of Lazare Carnot in an historical period which belongs to the most fascinating moments in the history of mankind. It is the period starting with the end of the victorious American War of Independence, which was mobilized around the highest conception of mankind, set forth in the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, which states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

A contemporary of Carnot, Tissot, in a little booklet written in 1824 about Carnot's military memoirs, recalls how much the American War of Independence inspired the true patriots of Europe: "The independence of America, conquered and assured by the help of our arms, strongly electrified the nation and in all minds plans how to improve the political situation were maturing; this was the subject of all conversations: The troops, upon their return from the Hemisphere, felt flattered to be called 'soldiers of freedom'; a spark could from one moment to the next cause a universal brushfire. . . . All the army identified with those that had founded the independence of America."

Indeed, the American War of Independence became the reference point for all republican humanists in Europe—as John Quincy Adams (U.S. President from 1825-29, who frequently, as a leading U.S. diplomat, had visited the European continent) stated in a speech to the U.S. Congress in 1821: "In a conflict of seven years, the history of the war by which you maintained that Declaration, became the history of the civilized world. . . . It was the first solemn declaration by a nation of the only legitimate foundation of civil government. It was the cornerstone of a new fabric, destined to cover the surface of the globe. It demolished at a stroke, the lawfulness of government founded upon conquest. It swept away all the rubbish of accumulated centuries of servitude. . . . From the day of his Declaration, the people of North America were no longer the fragment of a distant empire, imploring justice and mercy from an inexorable master in another hemisphere." Adams called the newly founded U.S.A. a nation "to which all inhabitants of the earth may turn their eyes for a genial and saving light . . . a light of salvation and redemption to the oppressed."

Looking at the humanist republican network in Europe, which for years had close contact with Benjamin Franklin; Robert Fulton, the inventor of the steam engine; the later U.S. Presidents John Quincy Adams and James Monroe, we see people assembled in France around Carnot and the scientists of the Ecole Polytechnique: Monge, Berthollet, Gay-Lussac, the brothers Montgolfier; we see in Russia a network of military people close the the poet Aleksandr Pushkin; in Poland, we see the network around the famous general Kosciuszko, who was educated in the same period as Carnot in Paris and by Carnot's teacher Monge, at the Ecole des Arts et Métiers in Mézières, while fighting in the American Revolution as an expert in fortification; in Germany, we see the network around Friedrich Schiller, the economist Friedrich List, and the Humboldt brothers—in particular Alexander von Humboldt, who, in his capacity as Prussian diplomat and universal scientist, living from 1807 to 1827 in Paris, had one of the most extensive networks of friends in the science community in France, including Carnot, the astronomers and physicists Laplace, Lalande, Arago, Biot, La Méthrie, the chemists Gay-Lussac, Berthollet, Thenard, Fourtcroy, et al. He also had extensive networks in the United States, Russia, and Ibero-America.

Carnot was the center of a network of "American" organizers—a European network, which tried to replicate the ex-

perience of the War of Independence in a flanking maneuver in Europe, by using the French Revolution so as to defend the "American System," in a war against the "British" feudal system in Europe. This revolution, as Schiller and Heinrich Heine had observed, started out as the source of hope and inspiration for all true patriots in Europe, but was subverted and sabotaged by British tools such as Robespierre, Marat, Barras, Napoleon, and the ensuing Bourbon restoration.

Carnot's expulsion from France in 1816 marks a watershed in European history: the beginning of the Vienna Congress restoration, the Carlsbad decrees, and the end of France's excellence—only later echoed again in the personality of Jean Jaurès and Charles de Gaulle.

The power of ideas

By studying the example of Carnot—his life, his military, political, and scientific work, and the tradition in which Carnot was based—we learn something fundamental about history which Lyndon LaRouche, in all his recent writings, has emphasized: We learn that history is based on *ideas* and that the fate of nations depends on people's individual and sovereign determination to fight for those ideas.

At the moment when France faced its darkest crisis, when defeat was almost certain, Carnot managed to turn defeat into victory. He did it by showing "excellence" in leadership, by making a revolution in military warfare, mobilizing the best scientists of France, making use of the Ecole Polytechnique so as to lay the foundation for a broad-based education of French citizens, while using his own discoveries of new scientific principles in the field of machine-tools and machine building, so as to create the basis for an industrial and technological revolution in France and Europe as a whole.

Carnot was convinced that the key to organize nations and people, to elevate citizens to become true nation-builders, is based on the *moral* quality of leadership whose excellence is not based in the academic knowledge of theories and books, but which shows in particular under conditions of crisis, wars, and duress. The biggest resource and strength in building nations is the sovereign, creative mind of the individual who, faced with the unknown—with obstacles and paradoxes that challenge customary opinion—is forced to look for creative flanks and bold solutions. "Circumstances develop sometimes faculties in us whose germ we did not think of, making our souls greater and giving our souls energy," Carnot said. Among his most excellent generals, he chose people at the age of 25 or 30, upon whose shoulder he put responsibility, having confidence in their powers of imagination and boldness.

That emotional quality of the mind, indispensable for overcoming obstacles and making discoveries, is what Carnot calls "enthusiasm"—passion. According to his son Hippolyte, who wrote the most insightful and wonderful biography of his father, "A great passion is the soul of the great totality." "Passion is the unique principle of all that is beautiful and great in the world."

In a poem called "Ode to Enthusiasm," Carnot writes:

> Enthusiasm, love of beauty!
> Principle of noble flames. . . .
> You are not raving drunkenness,
> you are not cold reason;
> you go further than wisdom,
> without exceeding its extent.
> Delicate instinct which precedes
> both the counsel of prudence
> and the calculations of judgment.

Without "enthusiasm," there can never be a creative discovery in science or art. Carnot calls that creative capacity of the mind the "natural geometry," where, with a *coup d'oeil,* or glance, with "artistic ingenuity" the mind forms new hypothesis.

The two Prussian reformers Gerhard von Scharnhorst and Clausewitz studied very closely Carnot's concept of warfare, as well as his scientific writings. People in Europe who so contemptuously looked upon those French "hordes of *sans-culottes,*" were, as von Scharnhorst analyzed in an essay on the French Revolution, taken totally by surprise by the quality of war-fighting, the moral quality of "enthusiasm." Clausewitz refers to it when he speaks in his book *On War* about the "*moralische Grössen,*" the moral magnitudes being the essence of warfare. The quality of "boldness," according to Clausewitz, has its roots both in reason and courage—opposite to one who is anxious, hesitant, or prudent. This, together with the quality of "mental alertness" (*Geistesgegenwart*), which accepts the unknown, and decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*), is the key for becoming an excellent leader in times of crisis.

Excellent leaders, as we see in the example of Carnot and LaRouche, love their nations, but are also friends of every nation, and would, if their own nation were to fail, do everything possible to keep fighting for its rescue, while helping other nations to fight for the common good. Because there is a principle of community of nations—based on the idea that what we work for is the uplifting and progress of humanity as a whole.

Carnot refers to this quality of excellence of leadership by showing that true leaders of nations are those who make no distinction between the love for their own nation and the love for the destiny of all nations: "How rare it is that the wise man is able to obtain the fruits of his labor! He is ahead of his century and his language can only be heard by posterity, but that is enough to sustain him. He is a friend of those yet to be born; he converses with them in his profound reflections. As a citizen he watches over the Fatherland, he takes part in its triumphs; as a philosopher he has already overcome the barriers which separate empires; he is the citizen of every land, contemporary of all ages."