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**Le Monde, 15.11.16**

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## **Year 1 of the trumpocene?**

### **The future of the planet depends not on the choices of a species, but of a single man**

It wasn't only a four-year nightmare - potentially renewable - that started on Tuesday 8 November with the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States. It was perhaps also the start of a new period on the geological time scale because, for the first time since the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, the whims and follies of a single man could have an irreversible influence on the whole planet and on the destiny of all its inhabitants, human or otherwise.

At a time when most scientists think that the Earth has entered a new geological epoch - the anthropocene - characterised by the influence of a single species (ours) on the major biogeochemical cycles, perhaps we should consider a new terminology? So, welcome to the 'trumpocene' where the future depends not on the decisions of a single species, but on a single member of that species: Donald Trump. Unless, of course, this new chapter turns out to be just a sub-period of the anthropocene (a 'stage' as the geologists have it). In which case, it will be better to talk of the 'trumpenian'.

### **Leaving the Paris accords**

Trumpocene or trumpenian? It doesn't really matter. Coinciding by a cruel irony with the COP22 meeting at Marrakech (Morocco) until the 18th of November, Trump's victory could kill - before it got properly underway - the fragile movement that began in December 2015, after the adoption of the Paris agreements, in favour of the fight against climate change. For Mr Trump, it's simple: climate change is a '*hoax*' or '*an idea invented by China to weaken American manufacturing industries*'. Consequently, during his campaign he has promised that he will permit the reopening of coal-mines shut down for environmental reasons. And that he will authorise prospection and extraction of hydrocarbon on Federal lands. And also that he will weaken the regulations made by the EPA (who are charged with limiting emissions from gas-fired power stations, and from gas and oil fields) to impotence. And Mr Trump has also made it quite clear that - in case of later disagreements - he will reduce the EPA itself to impotence. But most importantly, Mr Trump has promised to retire the USA from the Paris Accords.

But Mr Trump's arrival in the White House is much more significant than all that. What is at risk is much more than a 28% cut in the 2005 emissions of greenhouse gases that the USA has promised to undertake by 2025. What is the

international community going to do when faced with the defection of the second greatest emitter of greenhouse gas? What will China do? And what about Russia and India? There will be an immense temptation to give up trying. After all, what's the point of trying to patch the holes in the ship's hull when your neighbour is busy cutting new holes in it with an axe?

Driven by his brazen stubbornness, a single man - whose party, it is true, controls all the levers of federal power - may perhaps put the global climate on a trajectory even more surely accident-prone than it is today.

The "Trumpocene" will leave other footprints, too. Environmental policies are based on scientific knowledge, notably acquired by institutions such as NASA, NOAA and particularly the EPA: one of the primary preoccupation of the Trump administration will be to constrain as far as possible the acquisition of that knowledge.

And that this is going to happen is not in doubt. In his transition team, Mr Trump has handed the destiny of EPA to Myron Erbel who has had connections to Philip Morris and is also associated with the Comparative Enterprise Institute - one of the think-tanks that has contributed most to the attack on environmental science, and to drafting and distributing climatosceptic propaganda.

Placing the federal scientific establishments in the hands of such a person makes it perfectly clear that Trump's ambition is to transform them as far as possible into institutions charged with fabricating facts, and selecting or changing them according to the wishes of the director.

So the war on the environment declared by Mr Trump risks not only aggravating climate change: the "trumpocene" signals the start of an Orwellian distopia. A world, wrote George Orwell in 1942 after the Spanish Civil War, in which "*If the leader says two plus two equals five - oh, well, two plus two does equal five*" - and, he added, "*such a prospect terrifies me much more than the bombs - and after what we have undergone these last few years, that's not lightly said*"