How the Elite Destroyed Our Industry and Left the Working Man with the Bill

By Frank , 18 November 2026

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In 1974, I found myself in the stifling, scorching heat of Gabon. As a deep-sea diver, I worked on a SHELL pipe-laying barge for COMEX Marseille. The North Sea was cold, but the Gulf of Guinea was merciless. Underwater, in the pitch-black depths, I had to monitor the position of the steel pipes on the rollers of the supporting stinger. Today, that is computerized. That was the real economy: steel, sweat, pressure, and danger. We helped build the infrastructure that kept the world turning. No PowerPoints, no "stakeholder dialogues", no carbon footprint audits. Just brutally hard physical work that created value.

By Frank Dumon

In 1982, eight years later, I was in Vietnam, working for Agricomatex, a subsidiary of the Belgian Farmers' Union, as site manager during the construction of a textile factory with a capacity of 100,000 spindles. There too, it was all about reality: rebuilding a country utterly devastated by the hegemonic West, agriculture, logistics, the raw cycle of sowing and harvesting, of producing and transporting. It was during that period that I read **The Third Wave** by Alvin Toffler. His book, the sequel to **Future Shock**, which I had devoured in Gabon, was embraced by the Western intellectual caste as its new gospel. Toffler predicted the demise of the industrial age and the birth of a glorious "information and service economy". Much of Europe's once-proud textile industry has since disappeared or moved to low-wage countries. Our shoes, our clothing, soon our cars, our computers, our TVs, our energy supply: for all these products and services, we have become dependent on foreign production or raw materials. Meanwhile, we produce sanctions packages, politicians, and bureaucrats who, in many a meeting room, would be better replaced by AI.

I want to make one thing absolutely clear. I do not look down on the countries to which Europe has relocated its factories. Quite the opposite: **I have boundless respect for Vietnam and the Vietnamese people.** In 1982, I met people who had to raise their country from the rubble of war and destruction, while the United States would maintain its trade embargo until 1994. I did not see a people waiting for handouts; I saw people working, learning, improvising, and preserving their dignity. That distinction is essential. My anger is directed at the European rulers who squandered our own productive strength, not at the Vietnamese workers who built a future through knowledge and discipline.

Toffler's Third Wave: We Were Supposed to Replace Factories with a Service Sector.

What the Western elite failed to tell us, however, was who would pay the bill for this so-called progress. Today, more than forty years later, we look back at the devastation wrought by the Third Wave. It was not an evolution; it was a structural shift in favor of interest groups, the pillarized institutions, the pharmaceutical industry, and the financial world. A masterpiece of Orwellian doublespeak, in which producers were decimated, debts were maximized, and the **non-productive managerial caste** imagined itself invincible, while the population received VAT on top as a bonus.

The Great Demolition: Deindustrialization and the Debt Spiral

The core of my reservations about Toffler at the time was as simple as it was fundamental: without a robust industry and a positive trade balance, you cannot build an all-dominating service economy without ending up in a hopeless debt spiral.

Western policymakers, blinded by neoliberal dogmas and cheap labor in Asia, decided that making things was "old-fashioned" and "dirty". We exported our blast furnaces, our textile factories, and our shipyards to the other side of the world. In return, we got a "service economy".

But what is a service economy in practice? It is an economy in which we advise one another, send meaningless little messages to keep alive the illusion in which we live, and manage one another's money, while depending on foreign countries for every physical need – from a hammer to a computer.

You cannot heat a house with a consultancy report. You cannot build bridges with Excel sheets. And you cannot feed your population with the moral outrage of a climate activist. You cannot build nuclear power plants with "managers". Someone who restocks shelves at Aldi is now called a Floor Manager. Everyone wants to be a manager, but there is nothing left to "manage".

The result of this madness is a Western world running on debt. The United States, the beating heart of the Western empire, imports hundreds of billions more each year than it exports. How does it pay for that? By printing dollars and building up debt to the rest of the world. Europe is following at a slower but equally lethal pace. Countries that were once the industrial engines of the world are seeing their trade deficits rise and their national debts explode.

The "Third Wave" turned out to be a euphemism for financial cannibalism. The industrial elite was replaced by a financial and bureaucratic elite that does not *create* wealth but *redistributes* it – mostly into its own pockets. The profits of globalization flowed to the shareholders of multinationals and top managers in the tech sector, while local communities built around factories and ports were drained and left to decay. The working man – the welder, the shipbuilder, the electrician – was told to "retrain" for a job in "care" or "customer service", while his purchasing power evaporated and his future was pawned off to Chinese and American creditors.

Belgian Absurdistan: Seven Climate Ministers for a Bankrupt Country

The figures for 2026 make my criticism no less urgent. According to Eurostat, industrial production in the EU did rise again by 2.9% in constant prices in 2025, but the chemical industry and the manufacture of fabricated metal products each

declined by 1.4%. Industry has not literally disappeared from Europe, but the erosion of essential sectors is real. The European Commission also acknowledges that industrial gas and electricity prices can still be two to four times higher than those of our main trading partners. Not even Brussels can make that economic damage disappear with a PowerPoint.

If you want to see what the theoretical madness of the Third Wave looks like in practice, you need not look to Washington or Beijing. Just look at Belgium. After successive state reforms, driven by communal blackmail and politicians' urge to create more ministerial posts and corresponding cabinet budgets, we have created a country that is the textbook example of ungovernability.

Belgium has become an institutional lasagna, a tangle of overlapping competencies where nobody is responsible for the whole, but everyone can grab from the public purse. The ultimate symbol of this madness? Climate policy. In this tiny patch of land, where traffic jams clog the ring roads daily and the railways and De Lijn must cut costs, there are, in 2026, no fewer than *seven ministers* with responsibilities directly related to climate, the environment, or nature. Seven! Anyone who still knows exactly which minister is responsible for what deserves a degree in political archaeology.

Seven climate popes! Seven cabinets full of "policy advisers", seven armies of spokespersons, an endless parade of meetings, interministerial working groups, and international climate summits. One minister can point to another until everyone has written an impeccable press release and nobody is responsible anymore. While citizens are presented with one energy bill after another and can no longer drive their old diesel cars into the city, our climate popes preach austerity and sacrifice to the rest of the world. Anyone lecturing the working man might first explain how he is still supposed to afford the journey to work.

In its *Economic Survey: Belgium 2026*, the OECD warned that the fragmented structure of the Belgian state encourages duplication, administrative costs, and incoherent infrastructure policy. Eurostat recorded a government deficit of **5.2% of GDP** and government debt of **108.1% of GDP** for Belgium in 2025. I am not inventing this financial malaise; the figures are there for everyone to see. Only the political courage to do anything about it remains missing.

And then there is Brussels. The Brussels-Capital Region, the so-called "Capital of Europe", is in reality an economic black hole. A region that barely produces anything anymore, where unemployment is chronically high and infrastructure is literally falling apart, yet it has the most expensive administrative layer in the country. Brussels is bankrupt, but that does not bother the residents of the European Quarter.

They live in a parallel bubble, shielded from the reality of the working Fleming or Walloon who faithfully pays taxes every month to keep this circus running. Brussels no longer produces prosperity; it consumes the prosperity generated elsewhere in the country by real people, and spits it out in the form of directives, regulations, and subsidies for subsidized activists.

The NATO Agenda: The Military-Industrial Complex on Steroids

Toffler wrote in an era when the Cold War was still a clearly defined struggle. Communism had to be destroyed. Russia had to be divided. China was allowed to produce but otherwise had to remain backward. Africa was allowed to supply raw materials at ridiculously low prices but not to manufacture anything itself. Yet the institutions he and his contemporaries took for granted have mutated into monsters. Take NATO. At its founding in 1949, it had a purely **defensive** character: an attack on one is an attack on all, intended to deter the Soviet bloc.

But anyone who has watched NATO's actions over the past half-century knows that **defensive** has become an empty slogan. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO has morphed into the military-industrial execution squad of the Western neoliberal elite. From the bombings of Serbia, the disastrous intervention in Iraq outside international law (in which NATO member states operated hand in hand), the destruction of Libya (the most prosperous country in Africa) – which led to a massive refugee flow towards Europe – to the endless, disastrous occupation of Afghanistan.

For half a century, NATO has been doing exactly the opposite of what it claims to do. It sows instability, destroys sovereign states that refuse to submit to the Washington Consensus, and creates the enemies it subsequently needs to justify its own existence.

And now, as tensions with Russia and China are ramped up to frighten the population and close ranks, this alliance demands that European member states increase their defense budgets. First it was 2% of GDP. At the NATO summit in The Hague in June 2025, **5% by 2035** officially became the new target: at least 3.5% for core military requirements and up to 1.5% for broader defense- and security-related investments. That does not mean the entire 5% goes exclusively to weapons. But the political shift is unmistakable: first they find the money for the military agenda, and then the working man is left hoping that something remains.

Do you know what 5% of GDP means? It means a profound choice about our social priorities. How much will be left for decent pensions, hospital staff, road maintenance, or rebuilding our industry? A substantial share of military purchases benefits the shareholders of Lockheed Martin, RTX, and Rheinmetall. The taxpayer

gets to pay; the arms industry gets to book the orders. **Ask not only how much security this delivers, but also how much social protection, education, and industrial renewal we are sacrificing for it.**

European citizens are being forced to sacrifice their own prosperity on the altar of a geopolitical conflict that is not theirs, orchestrated by an American elite that is only too happy to see Europe weaken, as long as it buys their weapons and purchases their liquefied natural gas (LNG) at exorbitant prices. NATO is no longer Europe's shield; it is the chain shackling Europe to the sinking ship of the American empire.

Intellectual Suicide: The Bankruptcy of Our Education System

When I compare the ambitious, highly intellectual populations of Southeast Asia, Russia, Iran, and the BRICS nations with those of the EU, I can only conclude that the gap in education and discipline has become impossible to bridge. The deindustrialization of the West is not merely an economic failure; it is the direct result of deliberate intellectual erosion. **We have mortgaged our future to the path of least resistance.**

Look at our Belgian education system. What are the most popular fields of study? The masses choose the "soft" sectors: communications, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and law. Fields that cater to individual experience, identity, and the service economy. **What is the economic added value of these studies?** They rarely create direct, physical, or measurable added value. They redistribute wealth, facilitate bureaucracy, and write reports about reports, but they do not build bridges, design semiconductors, or solve energy crises.

The difficulty of these fields stands in stark contrast to the exact sciences. They mainly require synthesis, memorization, and opinion-forming. In an age of smartphones and instant dopamine, the path of least resistance has become the most popular route. The result is a structural mismatch in the labor market that perfectly explains high youth unemployment rates. The market cries out for technicians, welders, and engineers, while universities churn out masses of unemployed communications graduates and gender studies graduates. We educate young people for jobs the free market does not create, but which the government must artificially sustain with taxpayers' money.

Why does this education system, controlled by the traditional pillars of Belgian society, not innovate? Because Belgian education is a pacified battlefield. The Catholic network and the official network compete in a zero-sum game for student numbers and the subsidies that come with them. Innovation is expensive, disrupts the peace with education unions, and yields no additional market share. The status

quo is sacred.

It is an over-subsidized system driven by intellectual laziness and complacency. The focus has shifted from 'knowledge transfer, mathematics and discipline' to 'well-being, identity and learning how to learn'.

The waterfall system – in which students are pushed on to higher grades to soothe dropout statistics and safeguard subsidies – has led to an epidemic of diploma inflation. We are more than a generation behind. Flanders, once the undisputed leader in European PISA rankings, tumbles further down in mathematics, reading, and science year after year. Our academic and technical knowledge has eroded so badly that renewing education, let alone rebuilding our physical industry, seems impossible. You cannot build nuclear power plants or advanced chip factories with a generation that can no longer calculate and must spend hours debating its own feelings.

Why do so few young people choose STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields? Because it is hard work. Because it requires abstract thinking and solitary discipline. And why is the range of courses so limited? Because there is an acute shortage of STEM teachers. Those who master mathematics, physics, and chemistry go to work in the private sector for multiples of a teacher's salary. The system sabotages itself.

Questions About Belgian Education

Here too, the figures are on the table. According to the OECD, Belgium fell from 508 points in mathematics in PISA 2018 to 489 in PISA 2022, and from 493 to 479 in reading. That does not make me any less furious about a system that fails to value technical talent properly. A country facing a shortage of engineers, technicians, and teachers of the exact sciences must urgently stop treating vocational expertise as a second-class choice.

The following diagnosis of the Belgian, and by extension Western, education system strikes at the heart of our present social malaise.

1. **Most popular fields of study:** The masses choose the "soft" sectors: communications, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and law. Fields catering to individual experience and the service economy.
2. **Economic added value:** These studies rarely create direct, physical, or measurable added value. They facilitate the redistribution of wealth (through government, care, and media) but do not build bridges, chips, or power plants.
3. **Level of difficulty:** The threshold for the abstract, exact sciences is high and

requires solitary discipline. Soft disciplines mainly require synthesis, opinion-forming, and rhetoric, making them more attractive to a generation accustomed to easily accessible digital stimuli.

4. Future prospects: A structural mismatch. Diploma factories in the social sciences lead to oversupply, precarious work, and dependence on subsidized sectors.

5. Link to unemployment: High youth unemployment is the direct result of educating young people for jobs the free market does not create. The market cries out for technicians; universities deliver therapists.

6. Why the pillars do not innovate: Education is a pacified battlefield. The pillars compete in a zero-sum game for pupil numbers (and therefore subsidies). Innovation is expensive, disrupts the peace with education unions, and yields no extra market share. The status quo is sacred.

7. Intellectual laziness & subsidies: The system is pacified by guaranteed funding. The focus has shifted from 'knowledge transfer and discipline' to 'well-being, identity and learning how to learn'. The waterfall system has led to an epidemic of diploma inflation.

8. The erosion (PISA): Flanders keeps falling in the **PISA rankings**. Our academic and technical knowledge has eroded; we are raising a generation no longer capable of solving complex, multistep problems.

9. The STEM shortage: Young people avoid STEM because it is 'hard work'. Schools offer too few such courses because of an acute shortage of STEM teachers; anyone who masters mathematics and physics can earn multiples of a teacher's salary in the private sector. Vocational education is stigmatized as failure instead of being recognized as the backbone of the economy.

The Contrast with China and Vietnam: The Gaokao and the National Mission

Compare this decadence with China's education system. The *Gaokao*, the national university entrance examination, is one of the most demanding intellectual ordeals in the world. In 2026, approximately 12.9 million young people took this examination. Traffic is diverted in various places, and security against cheating is strict. These young people prepare for a long time, not merely to learn how to "debate identity", but also to master mathematics, natural sciences, chemistry, and classical literature. They know that their nation's survival depends on technological development. Education is not exclusively an individual quest for self-fulfillment; it is also seen as a collective, national mission.

In Belgium, we stigmatize vocational education (TSO/BSO); a child who chooses a technical path is seen by the middle class as a failure, a reject of the waterfall system. In China, by contrast, there is a network of more than 11,000 specialized vocational schools with 30 million students. This is not a second-rate dumping ground but the backbone of their high-tech economy. These schools are directly linked to industry. Students do not merely study theory; they work with Virtual Reality simulators to pilot drones, operate heavy machinery, and program industrial robots. They combine centuries-old discipline with the very latest AI technology. In the East, vocational education helps build the world's largest high-speed rail networks, solar parks, and space programs. In the West, our higher education produces an army of consultants who tell the working man how to offset his CO2 emissions.

Vietnam: A People Who Rose from War While Europe Squandered Its Factories



And then there is Vietnam. I cannot write about that country as though I were a tourist who cobbled together a travel blog after three days in Hanoi. I worked there from 1982 to 1988. I remember the shortages, improvising with limited resources,

the hard work, and the determination of people who, after the war, did not have the luxury of surrendering to cynicism. **Vietnam had to build factories amid the scars of war and embargoes. Europe inherited a magnificent industrial apparatus and allowed large parts of it to slip away.** Which of these two parts of the world actually had the better starting position? And which made wiser use of its opportunities?

The Vietnamese people deserve every respect for the path they have traveled. Not because their development has been all sweetness and light, but because it began under incomparably harsher circumstances. The *Đổi Mới* reforms from 1986 onward gave fresh momentum to production, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and trade. In July 2026, the World Bank classified Vietnam as an upper-middle-income country. According to its figures, GDP per capita rose from less than 500 dollars in 1986 to approximately 5,066 dollars in 2025; extreme poverty fell from 14% in 2010 to less than 4% in 2025. Not a propaganda pamphlet of my own making, but a development story described by the World Bank itself.

Vietnam's national statistical office estimated growth in the first nine months of 2026 at **9.01%**. Manufacturing grew by no less than **11.36%**. These are not PowerPoints about an industrial renaissance that has yet to begin. They are figures from an economy that actually produces things. Industry and construction together accounted for 38.35% of the economy's structure, while services accounted for 42.97%. Vietnam thereby demonstrates that industry, technology, logistics, and services are not enemies. **The problem is not the service sector; the problem is the managerial caste that imagines a society can function without producers.**

Perhaps the most meaningful achievement is not even a growth percentage. According to the World Bank, only 14% of Vietnamese households had electricity in 1993; since 2019, almost everyone has been connected. In 2025, approximately 95% of the population was covered by national health insurance. The man or woman who can turn on the light in the evening and has health protection knows the difference between economic development and the hollow self-glorification of the political class.

While some European policymakers seem barely willing to get their hands dirty, in Vietnam I learned to appreciate engineers, workers, and farmers who do not wait for a new job title before taking responsibility. That was true in 1982, and it is one of the reasons I return to this country with such affection in 2026. I admire Vietnamese culture, the resilience of families, the importance attached to education, and above all the unbreakable determination to decide their own future. Vietnam is not a prop in the geopolitical imagination of Washington, Brussels, or Beijing. It is a sovereign

country with a voice of its own.

The comparison with Belgium is all the more painful to me because Vietnam, too, is reforming its government. The World Bank describes how, in 2025, the number of ministries was reduced from 22 to 17 and the number of provinces from 63 to 34. Nobody needs to pretend that every reorganization automatically works out well, but at least there is an attempt to simplify the administrative structure. In our country, the political reflex too often seems to be precisely the opposite: a problem? Set up a new consultative committee. Doesn't it work? Appoint a coordinator for the consultative committee.

Of course, Vietnam also faces a difficult task. It must develop more domestic knowledge and added value, become less dependent on foreign supply chains, and cope with the consequences of climate change, including in the Mekong Delta. But these are the challenges of a country that wants to move forward. **To me, respect for Vietnam means defending the Vietnamese people's right to make their own mistakes, find their own solutions, and above all achieve their own successes.** They do not need moral guardianship from a West that can barely put its own industry, energy policy, and public finances in order.

The Working Man Pays the Bill

We no longer understand the laws of physics, economics, or cause and effect. If you spend more than you earn, you go bankrupt. If you sell your tools, you can no longer work. If you close your factories and stop teaching your young people how machines work, you can no longer afford the service sector and all its bureaucrats.

The architects of the Third Wave – the Tofflers, the Eurocrats, the NATO generals, and the Davos elite – have broken those fundamental laws. They have built a virtual reality, a mirage of services, financial derivatives, and moral superiority, while blowing up the physical foundation of our civilization.

- They tell us we must consume to keep the economy running, but punish us if we buy the wrong (because cheap) things. They tell us we must save the planet, but they themselves fly private jets to climate conferences.
- They tell us we must arm ourselves against demographic pressure at our borders, while throwing the gates wide open to cheap labor to depress wages, and at the same time wanting to send our sons and daughters to fight in other people's wars.
- It is a masterpiece of manipulation. War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.

And the Third Wave? The Third Wave was the greatest transfer of wealth, power, and sovereignty in human history, from those who *build* to those who *govern*. Industry has been dismantled. Trade balances have been ruined. Debts are unpayable. Schools no longer produce engineers but activists. And the state reforms have saddled us with an administrative caste that only knows how to tell us what we are no longer allowed to do, while it continues undisturbed with the systematic hollowing out of our continent.

And the working man, who keeps barely 25% of his gross salary, pays the bill. For diesel at the pump. For the F-35s flying over his house. For his children's failing education. It is time we took off Toffler's glasses and faced reality again. The Third Wave is over. The water is rising. And those sitting in the towers of Brussels and Strasbourg have no idea how to swim.

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