**SAMIR AMIN: MEMOIRS (extracts)**

**IDEP, Codesria, TWF, and WFA**

 **I The struggle for IDEP**

**Professor at IDEP–Dakar (1963–67)**

Sometime in 1962, I agreed to join a UN team to work on setting up an African ‘Planning and Development Institute’. I therefore went to Addis Ababa (for the ﬁrst time in my life) and spent a month there exchanging ideas with other members of the team. I have to say that I was not impressed by how things looked. The majority – African bureaucrats and foreign ‘experts’ – knew what was a ‘good development policy’ and ‘good teaching of planning and management techniques’; everything had been written up in expert reports and put in the heads of all good teachers. This demonstrated either incredible naivety or mindless conceit. My minority position had the support of some key people outside the team, both in New York (Philippe de Seynes) and in Addis (a few senior top African diplomats, some Ethiopian civil servants well above the average for the continent), and of the Englishman Arthur Ewing, who was temporarily in charge of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) until the arrival of Robert Gardiner (who also soon showed an inclination to take our side). It was therefore worth remaining involved in the project, and in October 1963 Isabelle and I left Bamako for Dakar, the base of the new African Institute for Economic Planning and Development (IDEP).

IDEP soon brought home to me the advantages of UN work – doing something new, in a multinational spirit – but also the extreme weak­nesses of the system, buffeted as it was by two centrifugal forces which, for reasons bound up with its international character, were impossible to reconcile. The rapid turnover of directors in the 196os – once a year for the first four years of its existence, when there should have been maximum continuity – was one clear expression of these weaknesses. Although the preparatory committee had produced a document defining the Institute’s aims, mode of operation and funding, as well as an outline of its teaching programme (plus a purely formal reference to research), it was a document in the diplomatic and ambiguous style of UN ‘resolutions’. The director and the team in charge of implementing the document therefore had consider­able autonomy if they wished to use it.

I do not know how it happened, but for the first year the directorship was entrusted to two men with poorly defined functions: Christian Vieyra (a legal expert from Benin, or, as it was then called, Dahomey) and John Mars (an economics professor from Britain, of Austrian origin). Each shout­ed aloud that he was the director, one in French, the other in English, as both were resistant to bilingualism and communicated with (or, more often, insulted) each other through the offices of a rather embarrassed interpret­er. Vieyra was close to the most moderate politicians in French-speaking Africa, especially Dahomey, who were highly sensitive to the views of the French ‘Coopération’ service (the former colonial ministry, quickly rebap­tized without a change of location or, for the most part, personnel). Mars was a mainstream economics professor, who had no experience of the ‘third world’ and had given little thought to its problems. He was also totally naive politically, and used to stand on his balcony (one floor above ours) to applaud some public figure or folklore troupe as they passed by in the street. He probably had some character problems too: we used to hear him grousing alone at night, or hurling his shoes across the room.

In 1964 Robert Gardiner, the director of UNECA, got rid of the Vieyra– Mars duo and appointed a Dane, Boserup. I have a lot of respect for that man, who, despite his somewhat Prussian stiffness, was open-minded and eager to learn. His wife, Ester, was an extremely sharp woman, whose work on demography and agrarian technological change (overturning all the prejudices about the evolution of work in so-called primitive socie­ties) is a classic in its field. We became friends, and many years later I met up with Boserup again in Copenhagen. In the period I am talking about, however, his task was to find an African director to succeed him at the Institute within the space of one year. He kept his promise, but in my opinion he made an unfortunate choice. The Senegalese–Mauritian Mamodou Touré did not have the right preparation for the job – although this did not prevent him from later making a career at the IMF (whose zealous servant he was in Zaire) and as finance minister in Dakar. Joseph Stiglitz recently wrote that the recruitment of bogus economists served the function of turning them into executors of a policy decided elsewhere, but his critical spirit was not much in evidence during his days as a servant of the World Bank. In fact, he was timid in the extreme and tried to avoid any research that might displease one government or another, one minister or another. For my part, I did not think it possible to teach without doing research, and I used the time available to us to work on Ivory Coast and Mali, as well as on the three countries of the Maghreb. My conclusions terrified Touré, who would have liked to put my ‘reports’ under lock and key and prohibit their use or dissemination. I began to think of leaving IDEP if Touré kept this position. And, when I left in October 1967, he was still director – although soon after he would be recruited by the IMF. His successor was David Carney, whom I myself succeeded in 1970.

In resigning from IDEP, I thought it best to explain my reasons in a letter to U Thant, then secretary-general of the UN, without mention­ing anything personal regarding either myself or my colleagues and the director. I simply said that, in my opinion, IDEP’s role should not be that of a technical college poorly placed in the competition with African and other universities; that the Institute should aim to become one of the main centres for critical reflection and teaching about the theory and practice of development in Africa. It was this letter which made people think of me for the job of director, when a UNDP task force under Vu Van Thai was set up in 1969 to propose solutions to the failure of the Institute to take off.

My original job at IDEP was to teach national accounting and African techniques (and experiences) of planning. I also taught input–output techniques (which were relatively easy to handle), but I also gave my students a warning about project analysis: either it is nothing more than a rationalization for capitalist calculations of profitability, and should be studied to understand how the real (capitalist) world functions; or a claim is made to extrapolate the logic of such calculation, giving it a social dimension that is alien to it. In the latter case, national decision-makers are offered instruments that are unusable, because they conflict with the type of decision that real economic agents operate. Such ‘planning’ – which the World Bank prefers, to the exclusion of all others – therefore comes down to throwing dust in people’s eyes; it expresses a refusal to plan. After all, if the market is self-regulating, what is the point of intervention? And, if development is simply the sponta­neous result of ‘market forces’, it becomes synonymous with the expansion of capitalism, whereas the whole specificity of the concept of development is precisely that it expresses a project containing identifiable social and political objectives.

For the more ad­vanced students, to whom I gave additional classes. What I had learned to do in Cairo and Bamako, and at the SEEF in Paris, was indispensable here. I set about teaching through a series of exercises, which I first did in class and then gave to the students to do by themselves. I devised a simplified General Economic Table (GET). I defined a ‘Plan’ in the terms in which plans are usually defined (investment volume, external funding, etc.), and used it as the basis for long-term (say, five-year) projections of the principal macroeconomic quantities. This made it possible to establish the crucial links between these quantities (propensity to import, coefficients of capital, recurrent charges, etc.) and then, by placing these quantities within a projected General Economic Table, to identify the inconsistencies. The tools: compound interest tables and the slide rule.

So, this is how I understood my job as a teacher. I would say that, for the third of students who had a minimum of education (albeit very general) or intellectual capacities and a will to work, the results were not bad. I met many of these students again in later years, in their respective countries, and I could see that their work was appreciated there.

 **Director of IDEP , 1970-1980**

The UN assessment to which I referred earlier had reached the conclusion that IDEP’s main role in Africa should be to analyse planning and develop­ment strategies and experiences, and to gear its education programme to this specific knowledge. This was exactly the position I had upheld in the commission responsible for setting up the institute, and which I had re­called in my letter of resignation. So, when my letter was found in the UN ‘briefing’ folder, it was normal that the assessment team should think of me as a suitable person to take over. Philippe de Seynes, whom I had not yet met, was given the job of contacting me.

I hesitated at first, unsure whether I could really implement the neces­sary changes in view of all the weaknesses of the UN system that I was beginning to know from experience. But I was in a strong negotiating posi­tion, so why not give it a try? I met Philippe de Seynes in New York for an interview, and found a charming man with all the qualities I described above. We were able to discuss frankly and cordially, and from that day we became good friends. I reminded him that I had certain views which I would never give up, that I would continue to express them in writing, and that this would probably not be to everyone’s liking. ‘It doesn’t matter,’ he said. ‘Someone without opinions cannot play the role expected of him in a position like that. Look at the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA): Raúl Prebisch doesn’t think twice about surrounding himself with intellectuals who are in opposition to their governments, some of them even political refugees, like the Brazilians Celso Furtado and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. ECLA’s success is due to them, and to the academic freedom inside it.’

So, I agreed in principle to take the job, although I feared that the ‘joke’ – the word I actually used – would only last a few months. First I had to convene the IDEP board of governors, which was chaired by the executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and submit to them my proposals. I did not think they would accept them, and I had no intention of wangling some kind of half-hearted agreement. ‘I won’t try to blackmail them,’ I said. ‘And I won’t let them think I’ll resign if the meet­ing doesn’t go my way. We’ll see. So, Monsieur de Seynes, please agree not to be surprised if you receive my resignation letter in three months’ time.’ ‘I’ll take the risk,’ he replied, ‘but you’ll see it’s not much of one.’ ‘They’ll have my hide in the end, though.’ ‘It’ll take a long time, much longer than you think.’ And history proved him right.

***The echo of Idep in Africa***

Soon after my arrival, I rang Gardiner and said I would like to meet him to tell him of my intentions. ‘I know what they are, you’ve already expressed them’, he replied. ‘Okay,’ I went on, ‘you know the principles, but the ways of implementing them also have to be spelled out, and I’d appreciate your views as we have to hear what the board of governors has to say.’ It was a polite exchange, but not enough to tell me whether Gardiner had been sincere in backing my nomination in New York.

I made a tour of the Institute and got to know the staff. Kwame Amoa had been recruited after my departure and was already thinking of leav­ing, but I immediately realized that he had some great qualities. Behind a phlegmatic, English-style appearance, this young Ghanaian was intelligent, sharp, thoughtful and progressive in his immediate reactions. I therefore at once thought of a first innovation in the work of the Institute: namely, the creation of a post of deputy director that he would occupy. I Egyptian and officially French-speaking, he West African and English-speaking: it would be good for balance and representativeness at IDEP. It would also ensure a degree of continuity, since each of us would have to travel that much less frequently. Finally, I could see that he had considerable organizational abili­ties – more than abilities, in fact, the temperament of a high-quality dip­lomat, who knew to perfection how to draft proposals, to negotiate, to get the gist of something, and to identify which concessions it would be worth making. We became very close friends, and I said of him that he could have been the foreign minister of a major power. None of the directors before me had imagined having a deputy; they had thought like good little autocrats, seeing their colleagues only as rivals eager to take their place.

I did not know the members of the board of governors, which was elected by a ‘Conference of African Planners’ that met every two years at ECA headquarters in Addis Ababa. Although the relevant ministers were supposed to attend this conference, it was in reality a gathering of develop­ment administrators, varying from insignificant nobodies to high-quality civil servants. It was not necessarily the best who were chosen for the IDEP Board, and the rule requiring linguistic balance and representation of all four regions of Africa (North, West, Central and East–Southern) compli­cated matters and created considerable scope for manipulation. Gardiner, probably by temperament, baulked at that kind of thing, but later Adedeji was not so loath to get involved in it. Anyway, I lost no time worrying about it, having decided on principle not to try ‘cultivating friends’ among the board of governors. Boards in my experience have had a heterogeneous composition, in the image of administrations in Africa and elsewhere. They generally contain some open-minded and competent members, with whom it is possible to argue, but also some eternal ‘daily allowance hunters’ who get elected so that they can have an opportunity to travel. In the end, Gardiner supported my proposals without reservations, but perhaps also without enthusiasm. The board of governors passed them without a problem.

With the governors’ approval, I introduced the idea of a ‘consultative academic board’. I thought it not only useful but necessary to be able to draw on the views of well-informed people; that is the kind of temperament I have. But the board of governors could not serve that function, and so I submitted a list of names to Gardiner. He approved this, but added that they were too important and would never come. They all came, however: people like Dudley Seers, director of the Institute of Development Studies at the new and modern University of Sussex; Celso Furtado, who gave us the benefit of the knowledge he had accumulated in Latin America and at ECLA; the Nigerian Onitiri, one of the longest-serving academics in Africa; Ismail Abdallah; and Charles Prou, director of the French Centre for the Study of Economic Programmes (CEPE). Do I need to add that the last two, though friends of mine, were not cut out to be anyone’s accomplices’? Their opinions, criticisms and suggestions were as free as anyone else’s.

The basic choice was to make IDEP a front-ranking centre for African theory and reflection; to take away from foreign ‘technical assistance’ or ‘cooperation’ agencies the monopoly of thinking about Africa. This meant emphasizing research and creating special teaching programmes to relay and continue debates.

There were various formulas to achieve this. We offered quite long courses (one or two years), which could tackle issues in depth and associ­ate students as apprentices in research projects, enabling them to acquire the tools of the trade. One of the main innovations was the holding of a 4–6 week programme of seminars outside Dakar. This had a number of advantages: in particular, each seminar could be attended by as many as 5o to 1oo students at relatively little expense (the seminars were monolin­gual and most participants were already living in the country in question); and the operation helped to build closer links with the local universities that shared the responsibility for the seminars, and with the government departments in charge of development. IDEP thus frequently played the role of catalyst and shock absorber between mutually dismissive academics and civil servants, and between different political forces and theoretical currents who otherwise had very little contact with each other. More than thirty of these seminar courses were organized during the 197os, in a total of twenty-five African capitals, thus giving the Institute a continent-wide reputation. Each of these operations was a real event in the country concerned, long remembered and discussed by those who took part in it.

To fulfil these tasks, we naturally had to recruit the minimum staff at the necessary level of competence. We did more or less manage to at­tract enough intellectuals known by their published writings for there to be no need to present them here. The team gradually fleshed out and, at one moment or another, included: Norman Girvan (Jamaica), Oscar Braun (Argentina), Héctor Silva Michelena (Venezuela), Fawzy Mansour, Naguib Hedayat and Hassan Khalil (Egypt), Samba Sow (Senegal), Jacques Bugnicourt and Duhamel (France), Bernard Founou (Cameroon), Cadman Atta Mills (Ghana), Jagdish Saigal (India), Marc Franco (Belgium: with a fine career later in the EU), Anthony Obeng (Ghana) and Joseph van den Reysen (Congo). Hassan Khalil – who was the spitting image of Nasser: tall, brown-skinned, wide nose, booming laughter – later turned to litera­ture and wrote some interesting memoirs. We also managed to strengthen the team with a number of ‘missionaries’, either funded by the French *Coopération* (e.g. Pierre Philippe Rey, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, André Farhi, Francine Kane) or invited by us as a result of one of our seminars. When we had the funds we allocated some of the latter to special research programmes: for example, the two Guineans Baldé and Kouyaté, the Malian Lamine Gakou, the Sudanese Hamid Gariballah, the two Senegalese Ab­dousalam Kane and Alioune Sall, the Kenyan Abdalla Bujra and the Ma­lawian Thandika Mkandawire. A young American, Barbara Stuckey, who came with a grant from Los Angeles University and was highly critical of the education system and society in the United States, proved able to give us a helping hand. Despite our duties, Amoa and I did not give up teach­ing; I would never have accepted the idea that one can ‘run’ an institute without direct knowledge of the problems: that is, without living contact with students and active involvement in research teams.

As I had learned at the SEEF in France, the best research programmes are those which the people in charge of them freely define and carry out. The team therefore served as a structure in which proposals and voluntary commitments could be discussed, and debates could be organized at various stages of the work in progress. If a few individuals may possibly have used this as a way of shirking responsibility, it probably produced better results than any authoritarian division of tasks. The evidence is the number of papers written – more than four hundred, some of book length – and the launch of a publication series with Anthropos in French and the University of Dar es Salaam in English.

The growing influence of IDEP led to a greater demand for consultative visits to the Institute, both from governments and from African regional institutions or transnational third world organizations (the Group of 77, the non-aligned countries). Unfortunately, we could respond to only a small fraction of even the most serious requests; neither our finances nor our human resources enabled us to do more without unbalancing IDEP’s activ­ity, which we wanted to be as well integrated as possible. Yet some of these missions were too important politically for us to turn them down, as they allowed us to hope that we could make a little real impact on political forces that had chosen in principle a progressive path.

The expanding activities of IDEP required more than the regulation budget funded by African states and the UNDP. We managed to collect more than 50 per cent of the sums promised by African governments – a little over $600,000. This was a higher percentage than for financial com­mitments to the UN itself, and much higher than for African official un­dertakings to any other African or international organization. But this did not prevent certain unsavoury types – Doo Kingue (whom the Americans propelled to the head of the UNDP), Bertin Borna (resident UN representa­tive in Dakar) and a few others like Paul Kaya – from waxing demagogic over the ‘mere 50 per cent’. When I left IDEP these critics were able to call the shots, and the percentage fell close to zero.

At the same time, Philippe de Seynes and Gardiner gave me carte blanche to seek out extra sources of funding, and I managed to collect almost enough to double the IDEP budget. The French *Coopération* people were really disappointing and have not changed since: their narrow regula­tions and petty chauvinistic vision meant that they never went beyond the funding of French teachers and researchers. It is hard to tell which gains more from that kind of overseas aid: the institution on the receiving end of French expertise or France itself, which thereby increases its stock of knowledge about foreign countries. I had better luck with the Italians (who agreed to fund a research programme set up by Baldé and Kouyaté) and especially the Swedes, whose recently founded International Development Cooperation Agency subsequently displayed exemplary generosity in rela­tion to our projects.

The IDEP administration supported our efforts with an efficiency for which I am sincerely grateful. UN institutions in the third world paid sala­ries considerably higher than the going rate in the local civil service and private sector, which enabled them to recruit high-quality local staff often relatively more competent than the managerial personnel. The administrative expenditure was certainly high, largely because UN pay scales, bilingual translation and interpretation requirements and my insistence on a well-stocked library meant that there was little objective scope for cost-cutting. I thought that there could have been economies in some areas, however. The unwieldy UN hierarchy keeps multiplying the number of administrative and financial jobs, and its accounting system is one of the most pointlessly complicated one could imagine: this does not exactly make it easier to carry out the indispensable work of auditing, but it does fuel bureaucratic guerrilla warfare when the circumstances are right! I therefore asked Gustave Massiah, whom I knew to be hugely competent in these matters, to look into the way IDEP was organized. I did not imple­ment the sensible proposals that he put to me, however, as I immediately realized that I would be leaving myself open to attack on ground favourable to the enemy. It was not the ground on which I had chosen to force my opponents to fight.

I did not imagine that IDEP alone could serve all the functions of a major research centre. It was therefore necessary to take initiatives and to create more specialized, complementary institutions. The IDEP director was in a good position to do this, and I branched out in three directions.

In 1972 I was invited to the conference in Stockholm that really began to raise awareness about global environmental problems. I immediately grasped their importance and in 1974, having negotiated for the Swedes to support a first trial programme for Africa, made Jacques Bugnicourt respon­sible for its implementation in Dakar. It was he who had the idea of calling the programme Environment for Development in Africa (ENDA), and with his good connections in the French *Coopération* establishment he secured funding for a core support team (Mataillet, Guibert, Melle Mottin, Langley and, later, Mhlanga) who soon got the project up and running. In keeping with my temperament, I gave Bugnicourt carte blanche to negotiate the ways and means of implementing his programme. Legally, however, the ENDA programme came under IDEP until 1977, when, as I had originally intended, it became an independent institution.

It was the same story for CODESRIA, the Council for the Develop­ment of Social Science Research in Africa (see chapter 2).

I will say more in the next chapter about the creation of the Third World Forum. For the moment, I will just point out that I took the initiative together with colleagues and public figures from Asia, Africa and Latin America; we managed to get Salvador Allende to invite us to Santiago to finalize the project (barely three months before the Pinochet coup). The founding congress of the Forum took place in 1975 in Karachi, where one of our members had obtained funding from the National Bank of Pakistan. I will also come back to the audience I had with Olof Palme (in the same year, I think) and to the invaluable financial support from Sweden’s Inter­national Cooperation Development Agency.

The 197os were the high point for IDEP: I can say, without false mod­esty, that its name was known and respected all over Africa. For that very reason, however, I knew that things could not last.

The US administration was fundamentally opposed to us, as it was – and is – to all liberation forces in the third world. However minor an institution like IDEP might be on the global chessboard, it had to be destroyed. For American strategy never neglects to do what needs to be done, on every front major or minor. The third-party positional warfare began in 1972, through mediocre or (corrupt) African bureaucrats prepared to play the CIA tune for the sake of their UN career. My counter-strategy – to get African governments on our side – was an application of the Chinese formula: ‘states want inde­pendence, nations liberation, and peoples revolution’. The idea, then, was a struggle to win respect for the independence of African governments. Once this had been defined as the battlefield (which meant giving up the secondary terrains I mentioned earlier), my strategy was simple: to keep governments in the picture. This did not mean reporting in detail all the enemy’s intrigues, but, on the contrary, treating them with contempt and making our own activities as transparent as possible to the top authorities, including heads of state, that we knew to be sensitive to the independence argument and capable of understanding the positive significance of what we were doing.

But then the enemy was given an opportunity to intensify the offensive. Gardiner left the ECA secretariat, and his successor, Adebayo Adedeji, was an autocratic and greedy young wolf. He immediately stepped up the guer­rilla warfare, using the ‘head of administration’ (whose career depended on him) to undermine our work and flood us with ‘memos’. I refused to fight on this terrain and did not even reply to the ‘memos’, thereby forcing Adedeji to come into the open. In 1978 he had the supervision of IDEP transferred from the UN to the ECA – that is, to himself – then set about manipulating the Conference of African Planners and the administrative board of the Institute so that they adopted two disastrous resolutions. The first did away with the national seminars and kept only the course in Dakar, supposedly in order to make it stronger. As a result, the amount of teaching at the Institute, measured in student/months – which had nearly doubled between 1970 and 1977 – fell back to its initial level by 1979, the year I gave up the directorship, and (as far as I am aware) has never risen above it again. The second resolution eliminated all the supplementary budgets under special funding agreements, and transferred responsibility for the negotiation of agreements from the IDEP director to the ECA. Of course, the ECA did not negotiate anything after that, or anyway never obtained any funding. I did save something from the wreckage: ENDA, CODESRIA and the Third World Forum could be detached from IDEP and had the means to establish their autonomy. I and Amoa (to Adedeji’s surprise) resigned in May 1980.

The three-month ‘joke’ had lasted ten years.

***The UN machine***

The modern world is made up of interdependent nations, in a context of inequality that has been growing constantly worse for the last two centuries. To devise and achieve a different organization and a different interdependence of societies, one which removes the polarization inherent in the expansion of global capitalism, is one of the major tasks of human civilization, if its body and soul are not to perish in the material and moral devastation that capitalist polarization inevitably produces.

The victory over fascism at the end of the Second World War and the rise of national liberation movements in Asia and Africa were the back­ground to the creation of the United Nations, the first attempt in human history to organize international relations on a global level (although it would take another fifteen years for virtually the whole planet to be cov­ered). The founding of the UN was thus a positive historical development; the United Nations is necessary, and if it did not exist it would be neces­sary to invent it.

My vision of the UN is therefore essentially political, unlike that of most who have operated under its banner and seen it as a kind of ‘pool of expertise’ that certain nations place at the disposal of others. That vision, corresponding to the ‘global village’ discourse, has always struck me as simply ridiculous, because it ignores the crucial dimension of polarization generated by the logic of the system.

Globalization is not a new phenomenon, and I was doubtless not the first to take an interest in the issue before it started to capture the headlines. But this dimension was already present in my earliest analysis of actually existing capitalism (my 1957 thesis). I have always thought that the most important unit for analysis was the world system, not the sub-systems that make it up. Anyone who remains confined to the framework of a single country – whether the USA or Belgium, China or Somalia – will not really be able to grasp the dynamics of change even at the level of his or her own society.

To be sure, this problem will not be solved tomorrow, for it implies fundamental changes in every aspect of social existence, in every part of the world, which can only be described as ‘socialism on a world scale’. Such changes will necessarily entail, at some point, a supranational perspective that goes beyond mere relations among nations; nor is it impossible that this requirement will first make itself felt at the level of large regions, as the construction of Europe might illustrate. But, as things stand today, the United Nations does not provide even the embryo of a worldwide supra­national framework. It is still a strictly inter-national organization. If it remains this indefinitely, there is a danger that its founding project will disappear from view: that is, the organization of the world within a human­ist perspective. The UN can help the world develop in that necessary and desirable direction only if its components – the various nations – pave the way by transforming themselves.

There are many obstacles to such an evolution, both locally and at the level of the world system. The main immediate obstacle, however, is United States hegemonism, which is no longer based on overwhelming economic and technological superiority – as it was in the period after 1945 – but rather on military strength backed up by the effects of neoliberal global­ization and a vulgar ‘culture’ of capitalism expressed in Anglo-American jargon.

In my view, then, the UN is not a useless, contemptible institution which, because of its generality, interferes with the real relations (of force) among nations. But nor is it the kernel of a ‘global village’, that naive idea popular in some circles that skates over the reality of the mechanisms of polarization. The main enemy, American hegemonism, exerts all its might to subjugate every country in the world, in varying degrees and by suitably adjusted means, and to organize the international order as it sees fit. This involves instrumentalizing the United Nations, and the struggle to defend that organization and its mission in the world is therefore synonymous with the struggle against American hegemonism. If I have dwelt a little here on these general points, it is because they constitute the lesson I drew from IDEP’s extremely modest battle away from the central arena. The US administration, for its part, does not overlook a single detail in its unrelent­ing struggle for hegemony.

The majority of developed capitalist countries have accepted US leader­ship and are therefore quite happy about the activities of the CIA. Britain made this historic choice in 1945, and no major political force there ques­tions it. The same is true of the other countries with British roots – Canada (now an external province of the United States in many respects), Australia and New Zealand. Germany and Japan have taken long-term strategic deci­sions that point in the same direction, limiting themselves to US-tolerated regional expansionism (towards Eastern and Southern Europe in the case of Germany, and Southeast Asia in that of Japan) and otherwise, on global issues, steering in Washington’s wake. Tokyo, in particular, considers its dependence on the USA an unavoidable fact of life, since it would otherwise be disarmed in relation to China and even Korea.

The situation has consistently allowed Washington to instrumentalize the United Nations, not without a certain arrogance in such matters as its late payment of UN dues. Things are even worse today, especially as Western diplomats have joined in the US-orchestrated campaign to denigrate the international organization in favour of NATO. It may be said that, apart from these medium-sized powers, other developed countries have been active within the UN system: the Scandinavians, among others. In terms of financial contributions and positions of responsibility, the weight of these countries within the UN system is indeed great. Do they exploit its potential to the full? The answer to this question is simple. I have often heard it said that top officials from these countries are ‘naive’ and tend to indulge in ‘wishful thinking’ about the role of the UN; or else that their Protestant culture makes them inclined to side with the hegemonist policies of the central American power. In my view, such explanations are at best highly super­ficial, but also largely false and misleading. Sweden, in particular, has taken courageous positions in support of third world struggles, some­times in frontal opposition to the United States. It welcomed American deserters during the Vietnam war (as no other Western country dared to do); it supported the liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies, at a time when no member of the Atlantic alliance was prepared to do it. I rather think, therefore, that some of the countries in question have made a strategic decision in principle to back the United Nations, perhaps because, given their modest size, they feel most vulnerable in a situation of international chaos. This decision of theirs seems to me correct and positive. It does not mean that the positions they derive from it are necessarily effective, nor that they are making the most of their presence within the UN system.

Third world countries were very active within the UN system through­out the Bandung period, and especially between 196o and 1975. Who does not remember those meetings of the General Assembly in Septem­ber–October of every year, when leading statesmen and famous journalists used to gather in the lobby of the UN building in New York? Nowadays, the only people one sees there are minor officials and insignificant report­ers. The diplomacy of the non-aligned countries and the Group of 77 used to force discussion of all the real issues of our time, from the nature of the international economic order (and the creation of UNCTAD in 1964) to the political intervention of the major powers in the affairs of the third world. I had the opportunity to attend several of these General Assembly sessions, as an adviser to some of the most active non-aligned states. I learned a lot there from well-briefed officials and experts, and I made a lot of new friends. The weight of third world diplomacy in those days helped to temper Washington’s ambitions, despite the presence of its African and other agents within the UN apparatus.

Whatever the value of third world diplomacy at the time, its role in the running of the UN was largely cancelled by the activities of the Americans and their ‘friends’. The latter, whose position in the executive hierarchy seemed to depend on their mediocrity, or on what the CIA had on them in its files, never had a function other than the one assigned to them by their bosses. There is no point in naming names: what I said earlier should immediately suggest a few. Many of them certainly looked the part. I am referring to their crudeness, of course, which I personally experi­enced at a few of the functions to celebrate someone’s passing visit. There is no need to attach names to these portraits: they are recognizable from the moment you set eyes on them. The trouble is that, behind these ‘friends’ of the Americans and the many others in the West who accept their strategy, one has always been able to glimpse cohorts of ‘experts’ and sometimes even ‘intellectuals’. They are not sufficiently strong to assert their ‘irreplaceability’ (besides, as de Gaulle once said, ‘the cemeteries are full of irreplaceable people’); nor are they sufficiently courageous to avoid the temptation of ‘making a career’. And, once that choice has been made, the rot soon sets in. Some even sink into alcoholism – no doubt in order to drown their sense of remorse.

Here I have simply tried to sketch the human context in which IDEP and many others had to struggle in those days.

**II Notes on the creation of CODESRIA**

This short note is based on a presentation by Samir Amin about the battles that took place during the creation of CODESRIA.

(i). The objective: What were the challenges faced in this battle? What were the functions that the founders wanted to assign to CODESRIA in the struggle of African peoples and African states for an economic and social development worthy of the name? What kind of institution was imagined to best fulfill this function?

(ii). The steps and negotiations undertaken for this purpose; the reasons why Dakar chosen; what status was envisaged for the organisation of the institution and the headquarters agreement.

**I. The objective**

There were two visions for the role and functions of CODESRIA, between which a choice had to be made:

(i)CODESRIA conceived as a sort of common home where university social science research institutes, would choose the leadership and would decide on its orientation and programs. These institutions would be represented either by their directors or others.

(ii)CODESRIA conceived as one of the engines needed to promote independent and audacious African reflections on the challenges of the contemporary world. Thus a call was made to African thinkers able to contribute to this, regardless of whether they were part of academia (the idea was not to eliminate the role of universities, but rather to combine their contributions with others). This was because it was recognized that creative thinking is not the exclusive monopoly of universities. Fanon and Cabral brought much from outside of universities through their reflections on the struggles for the liberation of African peoples. Today, the intellectual activists in civil society have their contribution to make.

This second concept was deliberately chosen, said Samir Amin, and the reasons for that choice were shared openly. This choice set the framework for the subsequent negotiations conducted to create the organization, and guided the founders in the choice of the first leaders. This deliberate choice has been at the heart of the success of CODESRIA.

**II. The first steps**

1. The Rockefeller Foundation took the initiative in October 1964 to invite to Bellagio (in Italy) ten directors based in some of the major research institutions of that time. The invitations were addressed only to ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’: the five Arab countries of North Africa were excluded. Of the ten directors invited, eight were British or French, one was Sudanese and one Nigerian (Onitiri).
2. Samir Amin was not invited as at the time because he did not have a position that entitled him to be invited (he was then a teacher at IDEP). He was nevertheless brought up to speed by an Italian friend at the OECD (who was associated with the Rockefeller Foundation). He immediately grasped the reasons for the initiative: the Western powers feared that with newly established independence, the directors of the institutions in question would be replaced by Africans sooner or later. They were afraid of losing their privileged influence in guiding the activities of these institutions, and wanted to ensure that the new leaders would conform to the views of foreign and international development cooperation.
3. Samir said he immediately understood that it was necessary to engage in these battles, to derail these plans and to open the way for the creation of an African institution capable of contributing to the development of autonomous reflections and critique.
4. The acronym for the institution imagined by Rockefeller and the OECD was CODESRIA, but at the time the letters stood for ‘Conference of Directors of Institutes of Research in Africa’.
5. Onitiri then took the initiative of organizing, in Africa, two successive conferences of these selected directors (still only those from Sub-Saharan Africa).
6. The first took place before August 1970 (when Samir took office as director of IDEP in Ibadan). Samir was not invited, again since he did not have a position that entitled him to be there.
7. The second was in 1971 in Nairobi at the Kenyan institute then led by Dharam Ghai. Samir was invited in his capacity as the director of IDEP. The atmosphere was friendly, but the crucial choice about the objective of the institution was still not clear. The majority of the Anglophone participants were inclined towards the first vision. Samir remembers that only he and Dharam Ghai frankly defended the second vision, fearing that even the ‘Africanisation’ of the leadership of the institutes would remain in the flow of the dominant thinking of ‘international cooperation’ that backed their governments.
8. The ‘Standing Committee’ of this conference was charged with the responsibility of advancing the establishment of CODESRIA (if one sticks with that acronym) and appointed Samir Amin as the ‘Vice President’ and chose IDEP (in Dakar) as the provisional headquarters of the ‘Depository Centre’ (that was the name given) responsible for the coordination of these efforts.

**III. The choice of Dakar**

Samir was convinced of the need to accelerate the procedures for moving forward.

(i)He carried out what some have called (as he said, not without reason) a ‘coup d’état’. He kept the acronym CODESRIA but used other words: ‘Council for the Development of Social Sciences’ rather than ‘Conference of Directors of …’.

(ii)He said he was convinced that it was necessary to integrate North Africa into the project in the pan-African spirit of the OAU and to break away from the isolation of ‘Black Africa’.

(iii)He was also convinced that the final headquarters of CODESRIA should be established in Dakar, but not at IDEP, even if the latter could provide a temporary shelter, as brief as possible, in the implementation phase.

This choice was not the obvious one. The large Anglophone universities of Africa advanced solid arguments about their capacity to provide a good number of their professors who would be capable of managing the programs of CODESRIA. But Samir saw two dangers there: first that Francophone Africa would play only a minor role; and secondly, the majority of professors provided by the Anglophone universities would be facsimiles of their foreign masters, conventional and anxious not to displease either their governments or donors.

Samir sought an audience with Senghor and told him of his fears. Senghor immediately grasped the importance and told Samir - you are right, go ahead, you have my support.

Samir said he feared, in return, that some would regard CODESRIA as a “new cheese” reserved for the ‘Francophones’. That was why he thought it was necessary to include at this stage some Anglophones who believed in the fundamental choices to ensure the balanced pan-African character of the new institution. Fortunately Cooperation Française, although well-disposed to giving its support to a Francophone institution, was not at all so disposed if this was to be a pan-African one that would give space to Anglophone, Lusophone or Arabophone countries.

Onitiri decided in 1971 to take his sabbatical leave at IDEP. It was a friendly decision even if Onitiri had probably not renounced his idea of establishing the institution in Ibadan. That was his legitimate right; the Nairobi decision of 1971 had not settled the question of the final location of the headquarters.

Onitiri made only a few brief visits to Dakar during his sabbatical leave. One of his Nigerian students - Abangwu - had been invited to assist him with getting permanent residence at IDEP, but he was not much help. In fact, he proved to be dishonest, leaving (after Onitiri) without leaving his forwarding address (on his return to Nigeria) but … after having tapped into the small funds allocated to CODESRIA at its birth. Samir insisted that he be sued in Nigeria, but without success.

**IV. The start-up team**

With whom should he constitute a small team of collective reflection for conducting the business of CODESRIA? In Samir’s opinion (and he informed Senghor of this), he did not wish to take over CODESRIA. He wanted the institution to become completely independent without delay and to have its own headquarters agreement with Senegal, its own offices in Dakar outside of IDEP, and an Executive Secretary that was not Samir himself.

He knew that some adversaries would not miss the opportunity of saying that he was spending too much time on the establishment of CODESRIA and that he was neglecting his duties as director of IDEP. He took the initiative of informing Gardiner, then the Secretary General of ECA, who supported him without hesitation.

Samir seconded Amoa (a Ghanaian) to IDEP for whom he had suggested the creation of a post of Deputy Director, with the consent of Gardiner who undertook to convince the IDEP Board. Amoa was extremely effective.

But, said Samir, this was not enough. It was then that he took advantage of a visit to Tanzania to invite Abdalla Bujra (a Kenyan who had a post at the University of Dar es Salaam) to join the team at IDEP and to lead the CODESRIA team. Bujra fulfilled his duties with intelligence and dedication.

Samir also took advantage of a visit to Stockholm to move things forward.

(i)There he discovered a young Malawian, T. Makandawire, then a brilliant doctoral student, respected in Sweden, and invited him to join the Dakar team. History has shown that this choice would provide CODESRIA with a quality leader of the greatest magnitude, an independent and bold spirit.

(ii)Samir took the opportunity to get SAREC on side. That was not an obvious step. SAREC, solidly implanted in East Africa, could have, with legitimacy, required that a Dar es Salaam headquarters would facilitate matters as well as their financial support. Samir explained to SAREC the reasons for the preference for Dakar: to give CODESRIA a real pan-African dimension from the start, to focus on critical thinking in matters of development and thus guarantee its own independence from all governments, as it should. Samir convinced them. SAREC immediately substituted the starter funders (Rockefeller Foundation, OECD, Cooperation Française and others) by, firstly, providing IDEP with urgent funds for the nascent CODESRIA (which helped to negate the argument of some adversaries that he was using IDEP funds for this purpose); and secondly, pledging substantial long-term support for CODESRIA (SAREC has scrupulously honored this commitment).

(iii)It was necessary also to obtain the signature of the government of Senegal for the agreement on the headquarters. The responsibility for these negotiations was entrusted to Bujra, supported by Professor Twum-Barima, director of the Institute for Statistics and Social Research at Legon University (Ghana).

Samir had in his possession a model agreement: that which Bugnicourt and himself had negotiated and obtained for ENDA. A ‘fabulous agreement’, it is said, due to the generosity of Senegal. Revised for the draft agreement for CODESRIA, Abdou Diouf, then Prime Minister of Senegal, accepted it without hesitation. Samir emphasized that the government of Senegal accepted the idea of an independent, authentic pan-African institution, and since then, no subsequent Senegalese government to this day has exerted the least pressure on CODESRIA. This was not the current practice in Africa or indeed elsewhere. The choice of Dakar was definitely a good one.

**V. Exiting from the colonial isolation of Africa**

The goal of CODESRIA as it was imagined was to contribute to breaking the colonial isolation of Africa by building close and direct relations with Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. Samir had started by organizing the first big Africa-Latin America-Caribbean conference at IDEP in 1972, followed by the first Africa-Asia conference organized in 1974 in Antananarivo.

In Dakar, for the first time, Africans heard the profound voices of the nascent dependency theories: Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Pablo Gonzales Casanova, Ruy Marini, André Gunder Frank and others. In Madagascar they met for the first time the great figures of India and South-East Asia: Amiya Bagchi, Ashok Mitra and others.

Samir’s previous meetings with these innovative critical thinkers of Latin America and Asia gave him a small advantage. Invited as a foreign guest in his personal capacity to the conference in Mexico of 1972, he witnessed the birth of CLACSO and made friends with Enrique Oteiza, its future Secretary General. The goal defined for this new institution was very similar to what had been imagined for CODESRIA: to think for ourselves independently in order to contribute to the commitment of our countries and continents outside the beaten path of globalization constructed by the imperialist expansion of capitalism.

**VI. Looking at the past, perspectives for the future**

Samir Amin hoped that his brief presentation would help a new generation to understand that the building of CODESRIA required the fighting and winning of great battles against enemies whom it was not necessary to name here. We would not have won these battles without the support of those whom we do need to name here, in the first place: Senghor, Gardiner, Dharam Ghai, SAREC.

The intelligent and dedicated contributions of the team at IDEP (Amoa, Founou) should equally be remembered, said Samir. We must also acknowledge our colleagues invited to constitute the first group charged with the task of creating CODESRIA, prime place given to Bujra and Mkandawire. Without them, CODESRIA would probably not have seen the light of day. But over and above the magnificent work of this small team, we managed to build a first network of African thinkers of the highest quality with whom debates have been permanent and ongoing, such as Claude Ake, Issa Shivji, Helmy Sharawi, Shahida el Baz and others. The members of the academic Council of IDEP - created on the initiative of Samir Amin with the support of Gardiner - and especially Celso Furtado (Brazil), Ismail Abdalla (Egypt), the British Dudley Seers and the French Charles Prou, but also other members of the Council who closely followed the first steps taken by CODESRIA. Other younger African thinkers in turn quickly made important contributions, like Mahmood Mamdani, Sam Moyo and others. The early involvement of African feminists (Fatou Sow and others), it should be remembered, happened at a time when it was exceptional in Africa (as well as elsewhere!).

CODESRIA was launched officially on 1 February 1973, with Samir Amin in charge as the first Executive Secretary. He was followed quickly by Bujra and then Mkandawire, and he credits the success of CODESRIA to them. Bujra and Mkandawire placed CODESRIA on track, which allowed their successors (Zen Tadesse, Sam Moyo, Teresa Cruz e Silva) to move forward.

CODESRIA is today facing a new and difficult situation. Africa is the major victim of the momentary triumph of the new imperialist globalization known as neo-liberalism. Its universities have been devastated and largely subjected to the exigencies of the funders. Impoverished and without a clear perspective of the real challenges with which Africa is confronted, many of the universities on the continent see in CODESRIA a source of financing for their own ‘research projects’, regardless of their relevance or importance. If CODESRIA is reduced to being the “receiving vessel” of these applications, it will lose its real function, which is to promote through its own initiatives the debate on the major challenges of our times. In this spirit, said Samir, it is necessary to understand that the discussions concerning the eventual revision of the statutes of CODESRIA and the definition of membership are downstream to the goals of CODESRIA and not upstream. For example, the proposal concerning excellence (who could suggest recruiting mediocre people!), for example, is irrelevant: ‘Excellence’ in the eyes of some can hide in fact a great mediocrity (irrelevant) from the perspective of the requirements for responding to the real challenges faced by Africa.

**III The Third World Forum**

**Genesis of the institution**

I have already said that, as director of IDEP, I played a role in the creation of other institutions for research and discussion: CODESRIA, ENDA and the Third World Forum. As far as the Forum was concerned, we straight­away thought it necessary to operate at the level of the third world, break­ing out of the isolation in which the colonial period had confined Africa.

In 1958, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) had founded an Afro­Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), with its headquarters in Cairo. In 1997 this organization tried to shake itself out of its lethargy by organizing a major conference together with the Third World Forum. I say lethargy because it had not managed, or perhaps even tried, to assert its independence vis-à-vis the most active governments in the NAM: Nasser’s Egypt, Indonesia (until the fall of Sukarno in 1966) and a few others. Their financial support had made its life too comfortable, so that it represented the various ‘peoples’ only via the single parties that were supposed to be their emanation. Moreover, AAPSO’s credibility had been reduced by its extreme ‘pro-Soviet’ option, and it did not embrace Latin America (except Cuba) on the grounds that the continent remained outside the NAM.

In the late 196os the Cubans had set up the ‘Tricontinental’, which presented itself as the organization representing the ‘peoples’ of the three continents. Once again, it was a question of grasp all, lose all. How to represent ‘the peoples’? The only two ways I know are the election of a representative assembly and formation of political parties. But, although elected assemblies may sometimes be credible within certain limits, there is no assembly of assemblies operating at a regional or global level. The European Parliament itself is not such an institution, as there is no European government accountable to it. Political forces have sometimes created an ‘International’ together with ideologically ‘fraternal’ parties: for example, the Socialist International or the Communist International. As to the Tricontinental, it was little more than a gathering of national liberation movements and the (usually single) political parties that came out of them; history would prove just how eclectic was this group of third world ‘parties’. Moreover, the orientations of the Tricontinental were more or less those of the Cuban state. What we had in mind was something more modest: an association of third world intellectuals. But, of course, it was necessary to define the objectives and then the selection criteria.

We were certainly not alone in considering this need for a more intense cross-frontier exchange of views among TW intellectuals.

In April 1973, the Allende government in Chile invited us to organize a meeting in Santiago. I remember this as the date when the Forum really saw the light of day, although it was eight months later, in Karachi, that it officially adopted its founding documents. In Santiago a number of decisions were taken in principle that would define the subsequent evolution of the Forum.

First, the Forum was not a club of ‘development officials’ operating either at national level (planning technocrats and others) or in the international institutions of the UN. There could be no question of creating a Southern imitation of the Society for International Development. The point of the Forum was to bring together ‘thinkers’. The term may sound a little grand, or even pretentious, but not every academic automatically had a place in the Forum; it was not meant to overlap with the international (or African, Arab, Indian and other) associations of academic economists, sociologists or historians, worthy of respect as these are in their way. We wanted something different, something that went outside the requirements, conventions and limitations of the academic world.

Second, the ‘thinkers’ in question would not be definable in terms of one scientific discipline (economists, sociologists or political scientists) but would always be ‘cross-disciplinary’. They could be academics, officials or people holding positions of responsibility in political or social organiza­tions, but such functions, often temporary, would not ‘entitle’ anyone to be a member of the Forum. If the Forum was to deserve its name – that is, to be a centre for debate and not for academic research – its participants had to have the necessary qualities to bring it to life.

Third, the thinkers should be critical: that is, ‘organic intellectuals’. After a long exchange of views, we agreed that this should involve two dimensions. One of the axes of critique was the idea that the world system was not per se favourable to development – in other words, that develop­ment was not synonymous with insertion into the natural expansion of the system, driven by its own logic. In my language, this meant that develop­ment was not synonymous with capitalist expansion and therefore implied conflict with its one-sided logic. But nothing was defined beyond this gen­eral critical position; everyone was free to judge the most effective ways of transforming the system and to debate them at the Forum. The other axis of critique was that the fundamental goal of development should be to solve problems facing the whole of the population, not only a minority. In other words, development had a meaning only if it was ‘popular’, only if it was of benefit to the people. We did not think that such development could be the natural and spontaneous outcome of an extraneous logic – for example, that it could result from the trickle-down effects of competitiveness and profitability. Once again, however, nothing was laid down beyond this criti­cal position. The alternative, which set the popular focus of development as the central criterion of action, might or might not be seen as socialism, according to how this was defined and to how one theorized the evolution of society. Such questions were precisely the ones left open for debate.

The meeting in Santiago also adopted a number of organizational pro­posals. One was that some of us should be given the task of starting up regional offices. I myself took charge of the African bureau, to be run from IDEP in Dakar where I was still director. I was further made responsible for coordination of the activities of the three bureaux, with the aim of holding a congress with at least enough members of the association to be representative. Some five hundred public figures were contacted and favourably considered, and it proved possible to invite more than a hundred of these to Karachi the following year.

Shortly after Santiago, the news reached us from Algiers that a group based at CREA intended to set up an ‘Association of Third World Economists’. Those of us who had some responsibility for the budding Forum were pleased to hear of this new initiative, which seemed likely to strengthen our common objective of encouraging critical debate on development. A first meeting took place in Algiers in 1979, at the invita­tion of CREA director Abdellatif Benachenhou. I took part in this interest­ing gathering, whose debates pointed in the same direction as those the Forum wished to develop, and the founding congress of the Association was held a little later in Havana. I personally regretted – and did not fail to say so to the people in charge – that the Association was giving too much weight to official government representatives; a Cuban minister was chosen as its chairperson, for example. The rush to attract sizeable funds (from the Algerian government, for example) also had considerable influ­ence on the choice of people to fill positions. In my view – and history has sadly proved me right – these tendencies damaged the credibility of the Association more than they boosted it. The Association ceased to exist on the day when, for some reason, the Algerian government lost interest in it.

The Karachi congress in December 1974 marked the official birth of the Forum. As regards its essential role and functions, those in attendance adopted the principles worked out in Santiago – which was hardly surpris­ing, given that its provisional membership had been selected on the basis of those principles. It was also natural enough, since if you want to do something you have a right to choose the means and strategy of achieving it. Those who disagree are perfectly free to do something else. Democracy means that everyone has a right to act in the same way.

The interesting thing about the Karachi congress was that it did not simply reaffirm the Santiago principles but began the work of putting them into practice. The quality of the participants made this possible, indeed necessary. The debates therefore mainly centred on the fundamental issues. What are the challenges facing the peoples of the third world? What is general and what is particular in these challenges? How are they defined by critical intellectuals from different regions, from different cultural and political backgrounds, and from different schools of thought? Which alternatives are being proposed, and what are the arguments for them? It was a very promising start for the Forum.

At the same time, of course, the congress adopted general statutes for the Forum. These called upon each of its regional bureaux to hold meetings at which the ways of pursuing the Forum’s goals would be spelled out in greater detail. Thus, when I left IDEP – which had housed the Forum’s African bureau between 1975 and 198o – we lost no time in organizing an African assembly to adopt regional rules for the Forum, in conformity with the statutes of the organization. That was in Dakar in December 198o.

**The expansion of activities**

In my opinion, the creation of the Third World Forum was a considerable success. The simple fact that it has survived – for more than twenty years at the time of writing – is testimony to this. For the cemetery holding institutions that were dead at birth, or that lived for only a couple of years, contains dozens if not hundreds of similar initiatives.

I have no hesitation in saying that the success was largely due to Olof Palme. In 1975, when the left wind was still blowing strong, Swedish academics had taken the initiative of creating a foundation to support independent critical research in the third world. The statutes of SAREC, as the institution is called, had been drawn up in a typically Swed­ish spirit, with nothing quite like them anywhere else. Although publicly funded, SAREC was not in the business of carrying out government policy; it was a genuinely independent body. For the Swedish state, having chosen to support critical thinking in the third world, was courageous in drawing the consequences. Such cases are unfortunately too rare.

The idea convinced Palme on the spot. Palme was one of those politicians who knew how to listen, and who, having formed an opinion, really drew the practical consequences. He also had a broad vision of world affairs, strongly critical of actually existing capitalism and American-Atlanticist hegemonism. The positions that Sweden took in the Vietnam war were evidence of this, and the decision to support liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies and South Africa sharply contrasted with the hypocrisy of all the other Western governments, which in reality preferred the Portuguese fascists and the apartheid oppressors. Sweden thereby gained a position on the global chessboard – alongside democratic and progressive forces – which was quite out of proportion to the small size of the country.

So, at the end of our discussion Palme asked me directly: ‘How much do you need?’ I explained that we did not want to succumb to the temptation to ‘start off rich’ – a temptation that is often fatal because of the easy op­portunities it offers. I said that we would need something like $1oo,ooo a year for a few years, after which we would have to prove the viability of the project and find more diverse sources of funding. Palme said: ‘I’ll double that and guarantee it for five or even ten years, if the voters stay with us that long.’ And that is what happened: the Social Democrats continued to win the elections at regular three-yearly intervals, and SAREC did not waver in its mission until the end of the 198os. The right, semi-neoliberal wind eventually prevailed, as the country drew closer to and eventually joined the European Union, and Stockholm’s courageous decisions of the previous decades were watered down.

The fact remains that SAREC’s generous support between 1978 and 1992 amounted to more than $2 million, mainly in allocations for the Fo­rum’s African programme, but also for the coordination activities for which I was responsible. This gave us enough time to look for other sources of support, chiefly from various institutions in Norway, Finland, the Nether­lands, Canada and Italy, as well as the EU and the UN University.

The African bureau of the Third World Forum also associated some of its programmes with UN institutions such as the Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), which managed the SAREC funds allocated to the Forum between 1978 and 1980. Philippe de Seynes was having an active retirement within UNITAR, whose director in those days was a gentleman from Sierra Leone by the name of Davidson Nichol. This arrangement, which enabled the UN to manage the Forum’s budget, continued until 1987. Then Nichol’s successor, Michel Doo Kingue, hastened to impose his bureaucratic views in line with his American bosses – something the Forum obviously could not accept. So, the arrangement was switched to the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), whose successive directors were the Argentinean Enrique Oteíza and the Kenyan Dharam Ghai, both Forum members and valuable intellectuals of great intellectual and political integrity. Some of the Forum’s African programmes were thus integrated into the UNITAR and UNRISD programmes, without the latter having to contribute any funding themselves; they simply managed some of the Forum’s finances in keeping with the rules of the United Nations (for a fee of 14 per cent, under the famous category of ‘overheads’). Of course, the whole budget – for which I remained responsible – was subject to an annual audit, in accordance with the general statutes and the rules of good management. The arrangement with UNRISD anyway came to an end when Bernard Founou and I reached retirement age and jointly decided to continue with our activities in the Forum.

In my capacity as IDEP director, I had participated each year in a meet­ing of directors of research and training institutes within the body of the United Nations. The agenda always included a point on the creation of a United Nations University, and opinions were always divided between those who wanted to incorporate their institute into the new UNU and those who wanted to leave out existing institutes and build something new from scratch. In the end, the formula used for the creation of the Tokyo-based UNU made it a kind of foundation to fund other people’s programmes, rather than a real university in its own right. Neither its suc­cessive rectors nor its senate made much of an impression on me. And the institution was saved from mediocrity, for a while, only through the efforts of its Japanese vice-rector, Kinhide Mushakoji, an intelligent and extremely active man with an open and critical mind. He managed to implement 9o per cent of the UNU’s actual programmes with 1o per cent of its budget, the rest being quite simply thrown down the drain. Mushakoji selected the Forum as a major partner in a programme of fundamental debates on the prospects for third world regions within the global system. Between 198o and 1985 this programme was one of the Forum’s principal axes of activity, and it was maintained in part until Mushakoji was forced out of the UNU in 1988: his efficient work was setting too bad an example! It goes without saying that Mushakoji became and has remained a dear personal friend.

Whereas the funding from Nordic countries was generally allocated to the Forum’s programmes on sub-Saharan Africa, the contribution from Italy helped to expand its activities in the Arab world. In this respect, the most memorable event was the great European–Arab symposium at Naples in 1983, which brought together a hundred participants from countries in the southern Mediterranean. Giuseppe Santoro, then director-general of Italian overseas aid in Rome, worked together with me on the development of this programme. It was a bold and clear-sighted initiative, which unfortunately no other European politician whom one might have expected to take an interest in the views of critical Arab intellectuals thought it necessary to pursue – a failure especially remarkable in the cases of France and Spain.

Nevertheless, in the second half of the 198os, the Forum reached what might be called its cruising speed. Its membership held steady at a figure around one thousand, a good half of whom were really very active in one programme or another. Over the past fifteen years the Forum has organ­ized more than 15o working groups, gathered more than 2,5oo written communications and published them under its own imprint and in numer­ous journals. The publication of work on Africa and the Middle East – in French, English and Arabic – has been running at the level of seven or eight books a year, and the eightieth title in the Forum’s African collection (a book on South Africa) appeared in 1998. Given its volume of activity, the Forum’s funding appears extraordinarily modest in comparison with that of institutions of similar scope. This modesty is actually quite intentional: the point is to prove that debates of great importance for the major issues of our time do not necessarily require the expenditure of large sums of money. The members of the Forum are high-quality intellectuals attracted by the debates themselves, not by any remuneration they may derive from them.

Dakar was certainly a happy choice for the Forum’s headquarters. I sug­gested it to President Senghor a few months before I left IDEP. He encour­aged me and promised the support of his government, and to its great credit it never ceased to show a real and sincere friendship towards us, without exerting the slightest pressure on the Forum. I do not know many other countries, in Africa or elsewhere in the third world, that have as much respect for intellectual freedom and take such pride in the impor­tance of the debates that it makes possible.

The Forum often opened new directions in its work. For example, it departed from the costly and ineffectual formula of the conventional ‘sym­posium’, where ‘papers’ with varying status are presented, and gradually introduced the formula of smaller working groups, each with a coordinator (who spent 3o to 5o per cent of his annual work time on this activity) and four to six participants (who spent Io to 2o per cent of their time on it). Over and above the personal views of its members, the ‘dossier’ drawn up by the group was supposed to take stock of the latest research on a par­ticular topic. Most of the dossiers were substantial documents (2oo pages or more) and were subjected to criticism by twenty to thirty people known for their competence in the area, their diversity of views and their eye for the practical consequences.

If the 196os were marked by high hopes of an irreversible process of development throughout the third world, especially Africa, the present age is one of disillusionment. Development has ground to a halt, its theory in crisis and its ideology subject to doubt. The Forum starts from the fact that the options available within the limited macroeconomic schemas offer only trivial, predictable results, and that we need to raise the debate to a higher level by integrating all the economic, political, social and cultural dimensions of the problem, both in their local setting and as they inter­act globally. In doing this, the Forum has helped to challenge the North’s monopoly on theoretical reflection concerning globalization and its uneven impact on its geographical components.

On the occasion of the Cairo meeting in March 1997, a group of thirty leading figures from the five continents, North and South, took the initia­tive of creating a World Forum for Alternatives – of which the Third World Forum is proud to be an active part. The Forum shares the conviction that it is more necessary than ever to intensify global debate by linking up the different networks that are pursuing the same objective – the construction of a pluricentric and democratic world system.

**IV THE WORLD FORUM FOR ALTERNATIVES**

**The Genesis of the WFA (1996-1999)**

Self-described “neo-liberal” capitalism/imperialism celebrated its triumph during the first half of the 1990s. The Soviet Union had disappeared, Eastern Europe had been reconquered, Deng Xiaoping’s famous sentence (“it doesn’t matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice”) was interpreted as synonymous with saying “why not the capitalist path,” and the countries of the South had, one after another, been subjected to “structural adjustment” policies. There were very few (but I am proud–without arrogance–of having been one) who said (I actually wrote it): we are only in the trough of a long wave just like there have always been in history. I recalled Gramsci: “the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” History quickly proved us right. The triumph of imperialist monopoly capitalism was that of a colossus with clay feet. The horrors that accompanied its triumph–the rapid increase in poverty, NATO’s wars of aggression–brought about a quick rise in resistance of all kinds, spontaneous and disorganized (but it is always this way at the beginning). It was imperative to provide an organized form to critical analysis, one capable of advancing a correct analysis of the challenge and, consequently, able to contribute to defining consistent and effective strategies for struggle.

Gathered together at Louvain la Neuve, at CETRI, then led by François Houtart, a small group of intellectuals who had been active over the preceding decades, and who had been aware of the obvious problems with existing challenges to capitalism (and had offered critiques of sovietism and national popular regimes), decided to create a “World Forum for Alternatives.” Houtart and Pablo Gonzalves Casanova, if I am not mistaken, suggested the idea and the name.

But how would we translate intention into action?

Upon returning to Cairo, I contacted the “Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization.” This institution had been created during the height of the Bandung era and Nasserism, had fallen into decay, but was still in existence–a building and a few employees, nothing more. Its president was Mourad Ghaleb, Nasser’s former ambassador to Moscow. Despite our political disagreements–which appeared small with the passage of time–we maintained strong mutual respect. When I proposed the idea to him, he jumped at the chance. “We can organize some kind of congress for the organization and you invite whom you want.”

Thus the WFA was born in Cairo in 1997.

The group of coordinators who appointed me chairman of the WFA did me a great honour, which is perhaps justified, if at all, by the fact that my activities over forty years familiarized me with a large number of organizations and leading personalities around the world.

 A working group–in which I voluntarily abstained from participating–drafted the WFA’s Manifesto. We owe this magnificent text to François Houtart.

The World Forum for Alternatives first appeared on the international stage when it organized the “anti-Davos” in January 1999, on the occasion of the annual elite conference at Davos. We were, of course, denied access to the holy precinct itself, but we took up a position fifty metres away, on the other side of the snow-covered street in this beautiful winter resort. Our small group included a number of committed intellectuals and figures from mass movements in the five continents, chosen for their high degree of representativeness: the farmers’ organizations of Burkina Faso, Brazil and India; the labour unions of South Africa, Korea and Brazil; the neo-Zapatistas of Chiapas in Mexico; the activists of the World March of Women; the ‘Sans’ in France and the ATTAC group. Helped into Davos by *Le Monde Diplomatique*, we were there to say that it was we, not the club of billionaires, who represented the real world. The Davos organizers, like the narrow-minded Swiss authorities, were so furious that it was impossible to produce the surprise a second time round. Hence the idea of a World Social Forum, on a different scale, for which Porto Alegre seemed a natural choice because of the considerable resources that the Brazilian Workers Party could mobilize for it there.

**Constructing Convergence in Diversity**

The World Forum for Alternatives is located within this complex universe. It is therefore a forum in the true sense of the term–that is, a place of mutual encounter and debate, not an ‘International’ (Communist, Socialist, Christian Democrat, Islamic or Liberal). It brings together currents of thought and action which, though totally independent of one another (a good thing, in my opinion), share critical points of view about the application of liberal policies to such areas of social management as relations between the sexes, environmental issues, human rights or intercommunal problems. All these currents have a place in the WFA, whatever their ideological inspirations or practical choices. The WFA programme for debate on the objectives, instruments and achievements of social movements around the world–whether it is a question of regional balance sheets, the stimulation of alternatives to agribusiness, or systematic reflection on universal values concerning individual, social and collective rights–testifies to the openness, which is a matter of principle for the Forum.

The World Forum for Alternatives and Third World Forum organizations are both a “network of networks.”

The World Forum for Alternatives’ role is to serve as a center for systematic analyses of alternatives to the present world order. Our enemy recognizes the importance of such systematic analyses without which no effective action strategy is possible. I am referring here to the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS), founded in 1947, with members like Milton Friedman, Lionel Robbins, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek, and Karl Popper, all advocates of today’s liberalism. I am also thinking of the Trilateral Commission, founded in 1973, which includes David Rockefeller, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Cyrus Vance, Andrew Young, and Paul Volcker among its members, all of whom have participated in designing the North American establishment’s strategy. The enemy recognizes that the major problem confronting it today is managing the criminal and impossible system it is attempting to foist on everyone. In the accepted jargon, this management is called “governance,” which has been made into the dominant concern for the programs of international institutions. Unfortunately, a large number of NGOs have adopted this concern as their own, in the best of cases for lack of critical reflection, in most cases out of opportunism. It is not clear at the present moment exactly what the enemy’s analysis is, though Susan George has attempted to evoke it with humor and sagacity in her *Le Rapport Lugano.*

Following our (anti-Davos) initiative, the first meeting of the World Social Forum (WSF) was organized by a mainly Brazilian committee, which benefitted from sizeable financial support, in cooperation with ATTAC-France and *Le Monde diplomatique* (Bernard Cassen). Others have written the history of the WSF.

The success of Porto Alegre I, in January 2001, did not feature on the front pages of the major Western newspapers. The enemy’s chosen strategy was to boycott the whole initiative. Nevertheless, the rich gentlemen at Davos grew a little worried and suggested opening a “dialogue” with us. I was lucky enough to take part in the ten minutes of airtime set aside for it on the radio.  *“Monsieur*,” asked my Davos partner, “how does it happen that an economist like yourself is not there with us in Davos?” My answer was simple. “There were three reasons. One: I don’t have $20,000 to spend on entering paradise for three days. Two: I wasn’t invited–which doesn’t surprise me, as my opinions are well enough known. Three: if by some mistake I had been invited, I wouldn’t have accepted, as I am not a billionaire and have no interest in joining the club of their servants.” “But, *monsieur*,” he countered, “I am not a billionaire.” “I know, you are the public relations director of a company whose owners are billionaires.” “What have you got against billionaires?” “Simple arithmetic, *monsieur*. Their profits doubled in the 1990s, but the incomes of all the non-billionaires–and there are a lot of them–obviously did not increase in the same proportion. You want inequality, and I equality. So, we are enemies, and I don’t see what we could have a dialogue about.”

Even so, Davos will not fail to “make an effort” in the future, and from the wide spectrum of social organizations it will find some “left-wing figures” to go, consciously or unconsciously, on a journey to the mountain of reconciliation.

In January 2002, Porto Alegre II took a great step forward that was well expressed in the “appeal” adopted at the final rally. The “social movements” have been growing more political–in the good sense of the term. Beyond the organization of struggle against the disastrous social effects of neo-liberalism, they are taking the measure of a system which already entails, and will increasingly entail, “military” barbarism on the pretext of a “war on terrorism.” The aftermath of 9/11 had amply demonstrated this.

The Third World Forum and the World Forum for Alternatives were very active at Porto Alegre, leading five major seminars at which the whole criminal political logic of global neoliberalism was subjected to analyses and commentaries by hundreds of the most lucid intellectuals in the contemporary world.

Nevertheless, we must note that the system devised by the World Social Forum has not withstood the test of time. The line advocated by the great majority of the NGOs that set the tone for the WSF does not fall outside the framework of what those who control the system are willing to tolerate. The critique of the WSF, formulated in a collective letter drafted at Porto Alegre in 2005 (the document is available on numerous Internet sites), was ignored and the WSF appears to us, consequently, to have exhausted its capacities and no longer meets the necessary requirements for mobilizing opposition. The last WSF (Montreal, 2016) turned into a farce!

Participation of the WFA/TWF in social forums, whether at the world or other levels, is not our main objective. What is a priority for us, first of all, is organizing meetings by ourselves for ourselves in order to advance our own analyses of requirements for the theoretical and practical construction of positive and real alternatives leading to popular and democratic advances. Yet, we would not ignore the social forums and intend to participate in them. It is a not unimportant means–among others–to disseminate the results of our own analyses. In fact, the WFA/TWF has probably been in attendance at all–or almost all–the forums held throughout the world, even if this presence has been more obvious in some cases, less so in others. I have personally participated in many activities of so-called civil society.

A complete agenda for the social forums should exist. Perhaps the WSF Secretariat could provide this. For my part, I have participated (as part of WFA/TWF teams) in the World Social Forums of Porto Alegre (2001, 2002, 2005), Mumbai (2004), Bamako and Caracas (2006), Nairobi (2007), Belem (2009), Dakar (2011), and Tunis (2013 and 2015). I have participated in some of the regional forums, which often are preparatory to the World Forums: Hyderabad (2003, Indian and Asian Forum), Lusaka (2004, African Forum), and Zagreb (2011, Balkans Forum). I have also participated in more topical forums: Amazonia in Belem, Brazil (2003) and Via Campesina in Valencia, Spain (2004). I have followed all the European Forums since Florence (2002), followed by Paris, London, Athens, and Malmo. I have personally participated in several Egyptian, Arab, and African Forums, but not unfortunately at those of the network that called itself the “Mashriq-Maghrib Forum.”

At each of the forums mentioned, we have always led four to ten round tables, led by six to ten of us who seemed the most competent in the areas in question. In some cases, the miserable working conditions certainly considerably reduced–for us as well as for others–the reach of our messages. On the other hand, at Dakar in 2011 and Tunis in 2013 and 2015, we benefited from much better conditions. Many participants and observers at these forums have noted the high quality of our round tables. The interested reader can find reports on these round tables at numerous Internet sites.

**Responses to Our Enemies**

The active members of our WFA/TWF networks, and I personally, have been and are invited to respond to the declarations of our enemies, the leading lights of “happy globalization.” To make an exhaustive list of these speeches would require some archival work, which I have not done. I shall restrict myself here to singling out a few of these speeches. An account of those of many other major actors in the WFA–particularly François Houtart–would certainly make the WFA’s work better known to the reader. A more exhaustive report of the WFA’s activities, which I am not attempting in my memoirs, would be very useful.

I shall indicate, then, in calendrical order, the speeches that I remember. The UN had organized at Copenhagen in 1995 one of the large conferences of its series pompously described as preparatory for the renewal of civilization for the 2000s; the topic was the “reduction of poverty”! This conference, like the others in the series, was “intergovernmental,” i.e., delegates with the right to vote were selected by member states. But members of “civil society” were invited as observers, sometimes with the right to speak, but nothing more. Our opportunity arose because the African states chose us–the TWF–to draft and present a report on poverty in Africa. I jumped at this magnificent opportunity to respond to our “partners”–in fact, enemies–the World Bank, the European Community, US-AID, etc. Our report was drafted from the contributions of twenty active members in Africa. Each of them provided a good report that, instead of drawing up an “inventory” of the poor and of poverty, focused the analysis on a critique of the policies implemented, which had inevitably led to a worsening of poverty in the countries concerned. The synthesis report assembled these contributions into a document of around 200 pages. The report had an impact. Some of the official African delegates praised it officially. Our enemies were furious. They simply insulted me and attempted to prevent me from crossing certain barriers (in the physical sense of the term) separating officials from others in the conference.

Typically, in May 2001, the World Bank called off at the last minute its planned “dialogue” in Barcelona with carefully selected NGOs, out of fear that some troublemakers might pose a few awkward questions. We therefore drew up a list of charges to replace that false debate between the World Bank and “civil society.”

The last of the major UN conferences of this kind was held in Durban in 2001.

The dominant establishment and the UN bureaucracy had previously controlled the expressions of “civil society” that were invited to participate in these international conferences; it had managed to do this through its hold on the purse strings and its manipulation of NGOs sufficiently apolitical to sign up to the mainstream proposals, which in effect cancelled any impact of the protests and demands of the peoples in the countries where the NGOs originated. The Durban conference had been planned along the same lines. The protest against “racism and all other forms of discrimination” was to be an innocuous event at which all participants, both governments and NGOs, would be called upon to beat their breast over the “vestiges” of discrimination afflicting “indigenous peoples,” “non-Caucasian races” (to use the official US language), women and “sexual minorities.” Some highly general recommendations were drawn up, in the spirit of North American legalism according to which an act of legislation is all that is required to solve a problem. The social and international inequalities generated by the logic of globalized capitalism, which are the essential causes of the main forms of discrimination, were left out of the original considerations.

This strategy of Washington and its allies was defeated by the massive participation of African and Asian organizations determined to pose the real questions. The issue of racism and discrimination, they argued, is not synonymous with the behavior of people still suffering from “outmoded” prejudices, who sadly are still present in large numbers in every society on earth. Contemporary racism and discrimination are produced and reproduced by the expansionist logic of actually existing capitalism, especially in its so-called liberal form. The forms of “globalization” imposed by dominant capital and its political intermediaries (above all, the triad governments) can result in nothing other than “global apartheid.”

A first question raised concerned “reparations” for the damage caused by the black slave trade. American and European diplomats tried to undermine the whole discussion by condescending remarks about the “amount” of reparations and the “professional beggars” who were claiming them on behalf of formerly colonized peoples. Africans certainly did not see things in that way. For them the issue was not “money” but recognition that colonialism, imperialism, and slavery were largely responsible for the “underdevelopment” of the continent and the legacy of racism. It was these arguments that provoked the ire of the representatives of Western powers.

A second question concerned the actions of the State of Israel. Here the Africans and Asians were clear and precise: the continuation of Israeli settlement in the occupied territories, the eviction of Palestinians in a process of veritable ethnic cleansing, the Bantustanization plan for Palestine directly inspired by the defunct apartheid regime in South Africa: these were but the latest chapter in its long history of evidently “racist” imperialism. Characteristically, the Palestinian question unites people in Africa and Asia, whereas it divides them in other parts of the world.

The WFA/TWF is always invited to participate in the “counter G7 or G8 or G20” conferences. We are almost always in attendance, and I personally have attended twice (Lyon and Saint Petersburg). I regret having missed the counter-G7 at Genoa, where Berlusconi’s police won notoriety by killing a youth.

I have only a vague memory of the Lyon meeting. The conference had been organized by a panoply of “nice” French and European NGOs for which it was imperative to avoid turning critiques of the policies of the large imperialist powers into a trial of “Europe.” For them, since Europe as community was not imperialist by nature, it should not have to bear responsibility for such policies. Thus, nothing was said at the conference that is worth remembering. A small number of participants from the Third World, including me, found this emptiness amusing. But the French had organized things well, culinarily speaking. At low prices, we could enjoy excellent dishes typical of Lyonnaise cuisine. A Moroccan, a Chinese, and I enjoyed a delicious meal together.

At Saint Petersburg in 2013, Boris Kagarlitsky succeeded in getting financing to invite foreigners–including me–who would come to reinforce the Russian delegation. This was a G20 and the topic was “reform” of the international financial system. But we all knew that developments in Syria (the allegation that chemical weapons had been used by the Syrian government) were going to occupy most people’s attention. Obama and Putin, moreover, had discussed nothing else. This was true of the Chinese, Brazilians, and several others also. The organizers of this counter-G20 had invited for our debates–at least for the financial question (we had, like the G20, put Syria on the agenda for our discussions)–an assistant to the Brazilian Minister of Finance. Pedro Paez questioned the financial system with his well-known talent and presented his counter-proposal for reform of the international monetary and financial system. Very good, but our Brazilian refrained from commenting. For my part, I had chosen another method to launch our discussion. I was content to say: you know, you Brazilians and other representatives from the emerging countries, we will never get a good reform of the system, since the G7 does not want it. We are going to be kept waiting around, from G20 to G20, from Stiglitz Commission 1 to Stiglitz Commission 2, with anodine proposals that will change nothing. So why take part in this game? We should move the debate, locate it outside of the G20 and organize it among ourselves, the BRICS, to advance, not an impossible international reform, but the construction of a space for us, as distant and autonomous as possible from the influence of the Western powers. The Minister’s assistant warmly approved of what I had said.

In some situations, I have declined an invitation to participate in undertakings to which I had been personally invited. I refused to participate in the “Stiglitz Commission” formed by the UN Secretary-General in 2010. I knew that it was a maneuver to impress and fool public opinion by leading people to believe that it was possible to reform the globalized system. Stiglitz, who has never ventured outside of the strictures of neoliberalism and is a specialist in window-dressing reforms, was chosen for that purpose. History has proved me right. The “Stiglitz Report,” delightfully empty, has ultimately, and fortunately, been remembered by no one. On the other hand, an UNCTAD committee proposed the beginning of a real reform. Obviously, its report was rejected by the Western powers.

**Solidarity Among the Peoples, Nations, and States of the South**

For all regions of the capitalist third world, the construction of an auto-centered economy is the unavoidable precondition for any further progress. This requires that external relations be subordinated to the priorities of internal development, not that the internal economy is “adjusted” to the external constraints (as mainstream economic discourse repeats ad nauseam). Yet the construction of an auto-centered economy–which remains indispensable at national level–would encounter serious obstacles if it were not reinforced by forms of regional integration capable of enhancing its positive effects. I am speaking here, not of regionalization as it appears in mainstream economics–common markets–which is unable to contemplate anything other than the logic of capitalist accumulation, but rather of regionalization where the political dimensions are decisive and can challenge the scientific, financial, and military monopolies through which the first world imposes its project of world capitalist expansion. Regions such as the Arab world, Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, or vast countries such as India or Brazil, can capitalize on certain advantages that history has bequeathed to them (a common language or culture, for example), but also, and above all, on the fact they have a common enemy.

Widespread demands for democracy and for the running of society in the interests of the popular classes would create the most favorable conditions for a way out of the present impasse. The geometry of these two dimensions varies from one time and place to another. But the art of politics, in the noble sense of the term, is not simply to adjust to them passively or actively–in the manner of power-hungry politicians–but to act in such a way as to transform them. As always, the future remains uncertain: it is not programmed in advance in accordance with some linear determinism, such as the rationality of the market; both the worst and the best outcome are possible. There will probably be some breakthroughs in the right direction, although it is impossible to predict where with more than a middling degree of probability. If these breakthroughs occur in a sufficient number of places and a concentrated period of time, they may snowball and radically transform the world situation.

Here again the choices of the ruling powers do not go in the direction I have suggested. The fact that scarcely any of the regimes in question has any real legitimacy is already proof that an alternative is possible. But it will become more than a possibility only when the culturalist illusions fueling many protest movements are dissipated–for such illusions are perfectly manipulated by those who run the capitalist order. It will certainly be easier to overcome them in some countries than in others and in some social milieux than in others.

In that perspective TWF and WFA have pursued continuously their debates with the organizations of the Third World: among others, the Non-Aligned Movement (which I have suggested characterizing as “non-aligned over globalization”), the African Union, the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization, the Asia-Pacific Peoples’ Organization (which demonstrated its real strength at the various official meetings of APEC). Parts of the UN system are themselves sensitive to these trends: UNCTAD, for example, which was created by Raúl Prebisch and run by a number of directors known personally to me (Kenneth Dadzie, Gamani Corea, Rubens Ricupero); or the United Nations University, at the time when Kinhide Mushakoji was vice-rector; or UNESCO when Mahtar Mbow, well ahead of his time, was waging the struggle for a “new international communications order.” The same was obviously not true of resolute opponents such as those G7 and US instruments, the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, although even they are now forced to confuse matters with various verbal contortions. Nor is it true of the United Nations Organization itself, whose secretary-general, Kofi Annan, produced a “Millennium Report” that seemed to come straight from the offices of the State Department. Other UN institutions–UNIDO, FAO, or UNDP–have now been vassalized by Washington and its loyal allies in the triad, whereas the institutions of the EU, largely because of its elected parliament, are quite sensitive to these trends, even if the bureaucracy of the Brussels Commission remains subject to EU governments and has gone along with neoliberal globalization. The summits held under these conditions–like the one on poverty, in Copenhagen in 1995, where the Third World Forum presented the only really independent report from Africa–have only a limited impact.

Then what do we do now? The WFA and TWF are today participating in the fight to restore the rights of the only international community possible, the UN. In my recent speech to the congress of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) in Brussels in 2014, I commented on this.

Across the world, in Hanoi, the Fondation pour la Paix et le Développement du Vietnam took the initiative in 2009 to establish a network charged with formulating proposals for strengthening South-South cooperation. Mme. Binh and her talented collaborator, Tran Dac Loi, invited me to participate in this initiative. Many colleagues in the WFA/TWF and I responded enthusiastically, of course.

I speak in these pages of solidarity among the peoples, nations, and states of the South I know quite well that states are what they are and are not always true representatives of their peoples. But I am not one of those who believe that we can “change the world” without modifying established states. Solidarity among peoples, and the struggle of peoples in their home countries, must and can have the objective of forcing states to change in ways likely to support popular advances.

**Relations of Cooperation between the WFA Networks and Networks from Countries of the North**

The TWF is, as its name indicates, a network of the South. When the WFA was created, we well understood that it was different because it is a *world* forum that includes the North in its network of collaborators. The task was and is difficult. The historical experience of North-South relations did not make the task easy. Relations among the world’s states are unequal by definition. There are dominant imperialists, on the one hand, and dominated peripheries, on the other. Certainly, outside of these relations, there are other relations among persons, organizations, even political parties from the North and the South. To be brief, I will note that the Communist Internationals, just like the churches, formed places for such encounters. Later, with the independence gained by the nations of Asia and Africa, conditions were created that permitted the emergence of–socialist or liberal–internationals and facilitated meetings between organizations from the South (Bandung) and some political forces from the North (Europe and Japan, the United States to a lesser degree) that put themselves forward as friends of nations from the South. But the organizations and parties of the South of that era–with national-popular tendencies–prioritized their relations with the East of that time–the Soviets and Chinese. That is understandable.

The dominant imperialist establishment had, for its part, formed non-governmental (in appearance at least) organizations that were allegedly worldwide. The Society for International Development (SID–headquartered in Rome) is a good example. In fact, these “networks” were formed–pushed by the World Bank–as North to South transmission belts. Decision-making powers were reserved for persons from the North or those from the South who were their devotees; the other “representatives” from the South occupied only minor roles. For that reason, I refused to join the SID, as was suggested to me.

Of course, we had no intention of reproducing an unequal North-South relation in the formation of the WFA. We even, to avoid this danger, bent the stick in the other direction, as it is said. That is, we gave to the South a representation that reflected more accurately the reality (the South is the “minority” that makes up 80% of the global population!). There are, thus, ten Vice-Presidents in the WFA from the South and two from the North; there is one executive secretary from the South and one from the North.

Immediately after its creation, the WFA contacted a large number of European organizations and individuals that we knew were sincere friends of peoples from the South. The results of our meetings are, nevertheless, quite meager and there is no reason to deny it. Responsibilities are shared, and I do not say that out of diplomatic courtesy. I remain severe in my judgments of the new European left; but I am no less so with regard to our lefts in the South. Personally, I am an internationalist along with others, of course, in our WFA/TWF networks. I am among those who believe that a better world can only be built together, when and if the radical lefts of the North and South are able jointly to define common strategic objectives and ultimately succeed, through the struggles they undertake, in producing advances in this direction, i.e., win victories (not necessarily the “final victory”!) in their own countries.

In my analysis of the history of the 20th century, I reached what I consider to be a sad conclusion: major progressive transformations on the world scale were initiated by struggles of peoples in the peripheries of the world system, through the socialist revolutions (Russia, China, Vietnam, and Cuba) and national-popular liberation movements (of the Bandung era). It was actually these advances that made possible those of the workers in the centers. There would have been no true social democracy (whose achievements I do not denigrate, on the contrary) without the “communist threat.” Nevertheless, the truly anti-imperialist political forces in the North–by that I mean the communist parties of the Third International–did not succeed in overcoming the relative isolation to which they were condemned in their own societies. The tragedy of the 20th century is precisely there, in my opinion: the isolation of the USSR, China, and the countries of the Bandung South. These countries suffered terribly from the systematic hostility against them from the states of the North and the inability of the radical lefts in those countries to prevent this hostility from reaching full strength. This situation is mainly what lay behind the limitations of what could be achieved in the 20th century in the larger East and South, and even behind the abuses and excesses, the stifling and ultimate collapse of this first wave of attempts to “go beyond capitalism and imperialism.”

To see a repeat of this same failure to achieve effective solidarity in the development of peoples’ struggles in the North and South today, in the 21st century, would be even more tragic. That is why I am an internationalist, to avoid adding to the risks of a tragic failure for everyone.

If I judge our European comrades harshly, it is for this reason: their awareness of the importance of anti-imperialist action is, in large part, far short of what is required. There are several explanations for this state of affairs, none of which justify it: (i) excesses in countries of the South (and East), which do not encourage solidarity with their peoples; (ii) the drift of the left in Europe (which originated in historical communism) towards a “humanist-social democrat” view of the world; and (iii) the focus of Europeans on the problems involved in the construction/reform/reconstruction of the European Union. If the European reader finds my judgments too harsh, I will respond that they do not appear unjust. Moreover, I am no less harsh in my assessment of struggles in the greater South.

**Towards an Assessment of the WFA/TWF’s Activities**

The most favorable conjunction of factors for getting out of the current impasse involves combining a widespread demand for democracy with a widespread demand for social management that benefits the working classes. All of the recent developments illustrate what I call the “autumn of capitalism.” But this has not coincided with (or not yet) a true “springtime of peoples.” The temporal distance between the two defines the nature of our era’s tragedy.

All societies on earth, without exception, find themselves in an impasse where the only future ahead seems to be the destruction of human civilization. The reader of my writings will doubtless have come to the same conclusion–if, that is, he or she accepts the analyses I have offered of the Third World, the former socialist countries, and the “first world.” It may seem pessimistic in the extreme, but that is not how I see it. The point, rather, is that the world capitalist system has reached the end of its historical trajectory and can no longer produce anything positive, if we assume that circumstances will allow it to survive at all. Human civilization is therefore at a dangerous crossroads: it can avoid destruction only by embarking on a new road, an “alternative,” as they say, which for me is synonymous with the long transition to world socialism. The neoliberal view of the world, though seemingly triumphant, is not viable. But the certainty of its collapse does not guarantee that what follows will automatically take the right path; the demise of liberal capitalism could produce only indescribable chaos, with consequences impossible to predict. This is not, however, the only exit from the impasse in which senescent capitalism imprisons humanity. More or less everywhere in the world, real forces exist that may initiate positive changes–forces visible today in the numerous struggles whose scale has already shaken neoliberal triumphalism.

Capitalism has built a world system and can really be overcome only at the level of the planet. Although national struggles have to be the starting point, without which no progress can be achieved at the level of the world, they are not sufficient because the scope for change that they can unleash is inevitably limited by the constraints of globalization. It is therefore absolutely necessary that these struggles should converge and open a way beyond the logic of capitalist accumulation, both in its national bases and at the regional and global levels.

The World Forum for Alternatives has a major intellectual responsibility. Our moment is characterized by a “treason of the intellectuals,” in the sense that the overwhelming majority of the “experts” (academic, among others) no longer seeks an alternative for the current system. They close their eyes, not without a degree of cynicism, to the destructive dimensions of this system. Some act to make a fortune in the tradition of pure and simple opportunism. Others busy themselves sterilizing their own “critiques” by reducing them to the minimum compatible with the main requirements of the authorities. This treason is not surprising. It is always so in all the important moments of “the end of an era,” when the established society declines, but the new has not yet crystallized from qualitative changes.

The strongest argument for pessimism about the future is based on the lack of visible subjects capable of undertaking the necessary historical transformation to put an end to the hugely destructive dimensions of senescent capitalism. To say that “the workers”–or even wage and salary earners more generally–constitute such a subject is likely to cause smiles all round. But the optimist that I am will reply that active subjects appear only for relatively brief periods in history, when a favorable combination of circumstances allows the different logics of social existence (economic, political, geostrategic, etc.) to converge with one another. At such moments, in ways impossible to predict in advance, potential subjects may crystallize into decisive agents of change. Who could have foretold two thousand years ago that the great religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism) would become decisive subjects of history? Who predicted that the nascent bourgeoisie of the Italian and Dutch towns would become the decisive subject of modern history, a class for itself with a keen awareness of what it wanted and what it was capable of achieving? Who predicted that the road to socialism would be opened by a revolution in Russia–a periphery of the global system–not in the advanced centers? And who predicted that certain “peoples” in the periphery–the Chinese and Vietnamese–would take over and become the most decisive subjects of transformation in the post-war world? This is not to say that present-day social movements will not occasionally constitute themselves into active subjects, whose precise shape is difficult to imagine. We need to give constant thought to the precise situations that might permit this, and to the strategies that would make it easier for their different elements to come together.

I will not offer here an appraisal of the WFA/TWF’s activities that have been organized in response to the challenges described in the preceding analyses. I believe that such an appraisal would be quite useful and a WFA working group would be capable of doing it. I will content myself with indicating two milestones through which our progress and our weaknesses can be assessed: (i) the WFA Assembly held at Bamako in 2006 that produced the *Bamako Appeal*; and (ii) the Congress held in Caracas in 2008, the committee reports from which are available on numerous Internet sites.

The reason for our success–as modest as it is–in contrast with the World Social Forum’s failure can be stated in a few words: we rely on those who understand that the autumn of capitalism will become the springtime of peoples only if the potentially radical lefts, in the North and South, boldly commit themselves to the formulation and implementation of the socialist alternative.

**Extracts from *A Life Looking Forward* (London: Zed, 2006) and *Mémoires* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2015).**