
Towards a Progressive and Democratic New World Order

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Towards a Progressive and Democratic New World Order

Samir Amin

Growing social distortions are taking a dramatic turn in the majority of countries in the west, the former eastern bloc and the south. The third world has broken apart into a group of emerging countries, which have now entered the industrial age and even developed the capacity to compete in world markets and a group of marginalised and excluded countries. The growing differentiation between these groups of countries has shattered the concept of the third world and ended the common front strategies of the Bandung era. There is currently an attempt to impose an opinion that globalisation is a take it or leave it proposition. Globalisation like everything else can be embodied in many possible alternatives defined by the balance in the relationships between nations at any given moment and behind them the specific internal social relations of these nations.

WE are all likely to agree on the fact that the page of the post-second world war era has been turned. We may further distinguish ourselves from dominant ideological and political tendencies by refusing to reduce this transformation to 'the end of the cold war'. For me, the transformation is defined by the collapse of the three societal models that shaped the life and struggles of the post-war period (1945-1980): the welfare state of the developed capitalist west, Sovietism, the projects of national liberation/modernisation of the third world countries. A 'return' to these models is impossible, and the desire for such a return is little more than the expression of a helpless nostalgia on the part of groups that have, in any case, largely lost their capacity to act. 'Remakes' would not be much better, for societies throughout the world and capitalism itself have changed profoundly and are not what they used to be.

We are also likely to agree that the development we have experienced over the past 15 years are not acceptable because in our view the economy must be made to serve the people, and not the other way round. These developments can be summarised in quite simple terms: we are speaking of growing social distortions as they take a dramatic turn in the majority of countries in the west, the former eastern bloc and the south. Massive and permanent unemployment has reappeared within the trade, the welfare state has been eroded, a new phenomenon of exclusion/marginalisation has become a permanent feature of the landscape. In the countries of the former eastern bloc and the south, the situation is even more dramatic. Rare exceptions involving some southern countries with dynamic economies deserve further discussion (the exceptions are relative, in any case: the same phenomena are observed in these countries but they are – as yet? – more subdued).

We do not accept the dominant argument that these developments are "the price we have to pay for a period of transition" that will eventually lead to a new, allegedly healthier and more dynamic economy from which all will benefit.

However, can we say that these social distortions are really a new phenomenon in the history of capitalist expansion? Or was the post-war era the exception in this history – an exception that can be explained as a result of the fact that power relationships, after the defeat of fascism, were more favourable to the labouring classes and peoples of the world than at any previous time? In that case, the current situation would be a return to normal (i.e., a return to the law of accumulation and pauperisation, according to Marx's theses).

The 'third world' has broken apart into a group of emerging countries, which have now entered the industrial age and even developed the capacity to compete in world markets, and a group of marginalised and excluded countries. Specifically:

(i) The capitalist countries of eastern Asia (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore), but also behind them, other south-east Asian countries (Malaysia and Thailand first and foremost), along with China, are registering accelerated growth rates, while these rates are collapsing almost everywhere else in the world. These countries are now actively competing to provide industrial products in world markets. In addition to being economically dynamic, they are less affected by aggravated social distortions (this point needs to be qualified and discussed on a case-by-case basis), less vulnerable (because of an intensification of intra-regional relationships that is specific to east Asia, and similar in degree to what has happened within the European Community), and characterised by effective intervention by the state, which plays a key part in carrying

out national development strategies, even when these national strategies are turned outward.

(ii) The industrial capacity of Latin American countries and India is equally significant. However, regional integration is less advanced in their case (20 per cent for Latin America versus 60 per cent for eastern Asia or the European Community), and state intervention is less coherent. Because growth rates remain modest in these regions, the aggravation of already huge inequalities is even more dramatic.

(iii) Overall, the countries of Africa and the Arab and Islamic world are still trapped in an obsolete international division of labour. They remain exporters of primary products, either because they have not entered the industrial age or because their industries are fragile, vulnerable, uncompetitive. Here social distortions mainly appear in the form of swelling masses of pauperised and excluded people. There is absolutely no sign of progress towards regional integration (intra-African or intra-Arab). Growth is practically nil. Although this group includes both 'rich' countries (oil-exporting countries with small populations) and countries that are poor or extremely poor, it does not include any country that behaves as an active agent in contributing to shape the world system. In this sense it is well and truly marginalised.

Active and marginalised peripheries are not distinguished solely by the competitiveness of their industrial production. There is also a political difference. Dominant powers in the active peripheries, and behind them society as a whole (whatever the social contradictions within that society), have a project and a strategy to carry it out. This is obviously true of China, Korea and, to a lesser extent, certain countries in south-east Asia, India, and some Latin American countries.

These national projects are confronting the projects of imperialism, which currently dominate the world, and the result of this confrontation will shape the world of tomorrow. Marginalised peripheries, on the other hand, have neither project (despite the claims of rhetoric such as the discourse of political Islam) nor strategy of their own. As a consequence, their thinking is done for them by imperialist circles which retain the exclusive power to initiate 'projects' for these regions (e.g. the ACP-EEC association, the 'west Asia' project of the US and Israel, Europe's vague Mediterranean projects) – projects which are not opposed, in fact, by any local project. These countries are therefore passive subjects of globalisation.

The growing differentiation between these groups of countries has shattered the concept of the 'third world' and ended the common front strategies of the Bandung era (1955-75).

However, as we shall see, there is no general agreement on how to assess the nature and prospects of capitalist expansion in the countries of the former third world. For some people, the most dynamic emerging countries are in the process of 'catching up' and are no longer 'peripheries', even if they are still at an intermediate level within the world hierarchy. For others, including myself, these countries represent the true periphery of tomorrow. The centres/peripheries contrast, which from 1800 to 1950/1980 coincided with the opposition between industrialised and non-industrialised economies, is based today on new and different criteria that can be defined through analysis of the five monopolies exercised by the triad (globalised finance, technological innovation, access to planetary resources, means of communication and information, weapons of mass destruction).

What of marginalised regions? Is this a phenomenon without historical precedent? Or does it embody on the contrary a permanent tendency of capitalist expansion, one that was momentarily checked, in the aftermath of the second world war, by power relationships that were less unfavourable to peripheries as a whole? The argument states that this exceptional situation was the basis of the third world's 'solidarity' – despite the variety of countries of which it was composed – in its anti-colonial struggles, its demand with regard to primary products and its political will to impose its own modernisation and industrialisation, which western powers attempted to prevent. It is precisely because the successes achieved on these fronts have been uneven that the coherence and solidarity of the third world have been eroded.

The dominant ideology proclaims that 'there is no alternative' and that the peoples of the world must 'adjust' to the so-called

rationality and efficiency requirements of the ('market') 'economy', according to us, capital (i.e., 'markets') must be forced to adjust to the requirements of people's social progress.

WHAT IS NEW IN WORLD CAPITALIST SYSTEM?

A number of major features of today's general economic situation have defined and seriously studied. At this point, it will be sufficient if we outline the most important of these features:

(i) The same fundamental options, known as neo-liberalism, inspire the economic policies of almost every government on the face of the earth. In the countries of the triad and within the European Community, these options are associated with recognised goals deregulation, more flexible labour markets, unlimited privatisation (including the privatisation of traditionally public services), cuts to social spending, emphasis on the fight against inflation (supported by tight money policies and high positive real interest rates), uncontrolled openness to international capital transfers, etc. In many southern and eastern countries these options are reinforced by the implementation of draconian 'structural adjustment' programmes (SAPs), and in some cases by what is known as 'shock therapy'. However, this general description must be qualified by important distinctions concerning the countries of east Asia (Korea, China, Taiwan and, to a lesser extent, south-east Asia), which are not really playing the neo-liberal game. These countries implement the kind of coherent industrialisation policies that other countries have given up, and that are practically 'planned' in that government interventions are designed to provide energetic support for their requirements.

(ii) A crisis is being experienced by almost every country on the face of the earth, with the exception, once again, of eastern Asia. Symptoms include weak economic growth (nil or negative for many eastern European countries and for marginalised areas of the third world), weak investments in productive activity, the rise of unemployment and precarious employment along with the growth of 'informal' activities, etc. We have already mentioned the aggravation of distribution inequalities that accompanies all this. Stagnation persists, even though official rhetoric still focuses on 'recessions' and 'upturns'.

(iii) Financialisation is taking place, i.e. the domination of short-term, speculative concerns, imposing themselves at the expense of long-term choices favouring productive investments.

(iv) As globalisation advances, so does the subordination of national policies to the hazards of this unbridled globalisation, made uncontrollable through fundamental neo-

liberal choices (flexible exchange rates, freedom of financial transfers, etc).

Together, these factors lead almost everywhere to economies running at several speeds: certain sectors, regions and companies (especially among the giant multinationals) record strong growth rates and large profits, while others stagnate, regress or disintegrate. Labour markets are segmented to adjust to this situation.

Once again, is this a genuinely new phenomenon? Or is a multispeed system in fact the norm throughout the history of capitalism? The phenomenon would merely have been attenuated for exceptional reasons during the post-war period (1945-80), when social relations had imposed systematic government interventions (on the part of the welfare state, the Soviet state and the national state in third world countries of the Bandung era) that made it easier to generalise the growth and modernisation of productive forces by organising the regional and sectional transfers that shaped this growth.

On at least two-levels, these transformations bring decisive long-term effects:

(i) Giant corporations are certainly not a new development in the history of capitalism. However, it has been rightly pointed out that some aspects of their evolution are new. Up until now, large corporations – even the ones known as multinational – have been in the first place (and particularly in terms of who owned their capital) national firms whose activity had extended beyond the frontiers of their country of origin. In order to deploy themselves, they needed the active and positive support of their government. Today, they have become powerful enough to develop their own strategies of expansion outside (and sometimes against) the assumptions of government, policies. Therefore, they want to subordinate these policies to their own strategies. Anti-government neo-liberal discourse conceals this objective to legitimise the exclusive purpose of defending the private interests represented by these corporations. The 'freedom' being demanded is not freedom for all; it is freedom for corporations to pursue their interests at others' expense. From this point of view the neo-liberal discourse is perfectly ideological and dishonest.

(ii) On another level more directly related to current technological revolutions, work processes are now being radically modified. Assembly-line production (the Taylorist model) is being replaced by new forms that are profoundly affecting the structure of social classes and their perception of the problems and challenges faced by workers. Here too we find important elements of the problems related to the segmentation of labour markets.

Financialisation can be analysed as a product of the crisis. Surplus capital, which

under existing structures cannot find an outlet in the expansion of productive systems, embodies a serious danger for the dominant class – the danger of a massive devaluation of capital. Management of the crisis therefore demands that financial outlets be provided in order to avoid this worst possible outcome, and high interest rates, flexible exchange rates, the foreign debt of the third world and eastern European countries, the American deficit, privatisation and the financialisation of pension funds are means to this end. However, the flight forward into financialisation does not offer a way out of the crisis; on the contrary, it leads to imprisonment in a stagnationist spiral because it worsens distributional inequality and forces companies to play the financial game. In this sense financialisation is not merely synonymous with the domination of financial institutions (banks, insurance companies, pension funds); it also means that financial assumptions dominate the management of all corporations.

The new east-west split, visible in all the areas we have discussed above, certainly challenges theories of the global expansion of capitalism.

The 'Asian miracle' has caused much ink to flow. Asia (or the Asia/Pacific region) as a centre of the emerging future, taking over the role of Europe/North America in dominating the planet, China as the superpower of tomorrow – what has not been made of these themes!

In a more sober vein, the Asian phenomenon has given rise to assertions which, although they strike me as hasty, deserve serious attention. These assertions question both the theory of the polarisation inherent in worldwide capitalist expansion (a theory that is unfortunately often confused with vulgar versions of 'dependence'), and the strategies of disconnection suggested as ways of meeting the challenge of polarisation. There is supposed to be evidence that catching up is possible, and that it is more likely to be achieved by active integration into globalisation (in the vulgar version of this argument, this can ultimately mean an export-oriented strategy) than by an illusory disconnection (which is deemed to have caused the Soviet catastrophe).

Internal factors, including the 'cultural' factor, would therefore explain why some have succeeded in imposing themselves as agents actively shaping the world, while others have failed and become marginalised and disconnected against their will.

If we are to make genuine progress in discussing these complex issues, we need clearly to distinguish the various levels of analysis dealing with internal social structures and forces acting at the level of the world system. These fit together in a way that it is preferable to make explicit if we want to

go beyond facile, but pointless, polemics. In my view the Soviet evolution, for example, is chiefly explained by the nature of the system's social options (the 'capitalism without capitalist' project). An active and controlled integration into globalisation is very different from an economic strategy based on giving priority to exports; each is founded on a different internal hegemonic, social bloc. East Asian countries have been successful precisely to the extent that they have subjected their external relationships to the requirements of their internal development – have refused, in other words, to 'adjust' to dominant tendencies at the world level. This is in fact the definition of delinking, which some too hasty readers have confused with autarky.

Polarisation, like any other aspects of capitalist society, has not been defined once and for all in some immutable form. What has certainly changed is the way in which it expressed itself for a century and a half through the contrast between industrialised and non-industrialised countries – a contrast that has in fact been challenged by the peripheries' national liberation movements, which have forced the centre itself to adjust to transformations brought about by the industrialisation (however uneven) of the peripheries. Can this fact justify the assertion that east Asia is in the process of 'catching up' with triad centres? The conclusion seems overhasty. The thesis I am presenting here leads to a very different conclusion: through the action of the triad's five monopolies, the globalised law of value produces polarisation in new forms, subordinating the industry of dynamic peripheries. China, if it chooses further integration into international division of labour, will not escape this evolution.

The evolution of China's development will weigh heavily in the global balance, simply because of the weight of this continent/country. The various possibilities in this regard should therefore be thoroughly discussed.

I will attempt to make explicit the conditions, internal and external, that govern various scenarios all of which are equally possible and which can be classified as follows:

(i) The country; breaks up (this is the objective of the US and Japanese strategies); China's north and west are 'marginalised', and the south-east becomes a compradorised region within the south-east Asian constellation, which is industrialised, but nonetheless dominated by the US and Japan.

(ii) The Chinese national project is pursued on the basis of the success of the 'three positives' (social redistribution of income is sufficient to maintain solidarity throughout the region, regional redistribution reinforces the interdependence of China's regional internal markets, and control over external

realities continues to be subordinated to the requirements of the national project).

(iii) This last scenario deteriorates under the influence of what I have called the 'fourth and major negative', i.e. the attempt to pursue the national project without modifying the framework of the existing power system (the party state described as Leninist). This deterioration could lead either to the break-up of the country (first scenario) or to the crystallisation of a more overt, and probably not very democratic, form of national capitalism.

(iv) The current projects shift towards the left as popular social forces reinforce their power, and the country moves forward in the long transition to socialism.

The problems of the construction of Europe must also be reassessed within this global framework. I am sorry that the debate on these issues within the European left is too often confined to continental horizons, or, at best, to those of the triad. Beyond this, one hears little more than pious hopes (especially on the topic of north-south relations).

(i) The construction of Europe began as a common market project. Having scored easy triumphs during the expansion phase of the world economy (until around 1975), the project has become increasingly difficult now that capitalism has entered into its structural crisis phase. In my view, going beyond a common market towards multi-dimensional economic integration implies that a high priority be given to the political integration of Europe. However, political integration is coming up against the persistence of national realities, and furthermore the left (along with the right) is divided on this issue in all countries within the community. Under these conditions, is the priority given to the common currency (the euro, Maastricht) likely to activate the necessary political integration, or will it rather cause the contradictions between European states to explode? This question itself is a topic of discussion and disagreement within the European left.

(ii) In Europe, the neo-liberal programme is endorsed by dominant powers (not only right-wing forces, but also electorally dominant socialists, even though their endorsement is sometimes qualified). Under these conditions, the establishment of a social alternative (a new, progressive social compromise throughout the community) does not seem to be on the agenda. However, a debate has begun on what a new European social pact might be like, and it is important to pursue this debate and define its strategic options and perspectives. Beyond 'magical' terms of uncertain meaning ('neo-Keynesianism'?), what in fact is wanted? Is it (a) a social 'Fortress Europe', or (b) an open social Europe, and in that case, how

should it manage its relations with the US, Japan and the peripheries?

(iii) Dominant interests in Europe (large corporations), like those of Japan and the US, are defining their strategies in a context of unbridled globalisation. It follows that they are not active agents capable of challenging American hegemony at the global level, or of developing another vision of north-south relations.

(iv) It also follows that new east-west relations within Europe spontaneously fit into the framework of the 'Latin-Americanisation' of eastern Europe, rather than its integration on an equal footing. Will European left-wing forces, in the west and east, be able to join forces in defining a different strategy – one that meets the requirements of a progressive, pan-European social pact?

(v) Liberal options and the Latin-Americanisation of eastern Europe are tilting the imbalance within the community in Germany's favour. Will 'German Europe' be acceptable, in the long run, to the UK, France and Russia? In the meantime, endorsement of this project perpetuates America's global hegemony, since Germany, like Japan, plays the part of a regional power aligned with the US on world issues.

GLOBAL MANAGEMENT OF THE CRISIS

The requirements of the economic management of the crisis are expressed in the economic policies described above. However, this dimension of the management of the system cannot work on its own, without the support of appropriate political forms, for neo-liberalism engenders nothing but chaos and leads to the multiplication of seemingly insoluble conflicts. This is why I have argued that it is not a viable alternative, but merely a method for managing the crisis (this point has given rise to disagreements whose meaning should be clarified).

We would probably all agree that the structure of political life was profoundly modified when the page of the post-war era was turned. Political life and struggles traditionally took place within the framework of political states whose legitimacy was not questioned (a government might be challenged, but not the state itself). Behind and in the state, political parties, trade unions, a few major institutions (i.e. business leaders) and the sphere defined by the media as 'the political class' formed the basic structure of the system in which political movements, social struggles and ideological currents found expression.

It is apparent that almost everywhere in the world, all of these institutions have lost part or all their legitimacy. The people 'don't believe in them anymore'. In their place a variety of 'movements' have taken centre stage, focusing on the demands of environmentalists

or women or the struggle for democracy or social justice, or asserting community identities (ethnic or religious). The status of these movements, their patterns of organisation or non-organisation, their methods of expression (in some cases purely declamatory, in others acting through the channels of political life such as parties and elections, and sometimes resorting to violence terrorist or other) vary from one country to the next and often from one moment to the next. Extreme instability is therefore a characteristic of this new political life. The way in which these demands and movements combine with a radical critique (i.e. of actually existing capitalism), or fit into globalised neo-liberal management, deserves to be discussed in concrete terms. Some of these movements are or can be part of a conscious and organised refusal of the societal project of dominant powers; others, on the contrary, are not interested in fighting this project.

Dominant powers know how to make this distinction and do in fact make it. Manipulation or overt or concealed support for some, determined opposition to others, such is the rule in these new, chaotic and agitated political life. The left must also make its own analyses and remember them in defining its strategies for mobilisation and action. One of the major themes of the neo-liberal offensive out by dominant powers is an all-encompassing anti-state ideology.

We have already noted that this offensive serves the private interests of large corporations seeking to free themselves from possible government intervention, because the government might be responsive to interests other than theirs. However, this does not mean that the world could really function as a pure market, without governments. Large corporations themselves, and capital in general, need a government able, at the very least, to act as a police officer. The functions of this police officer, at the national and world levels, vary according to the situation.

In the countries of the periphery in the widest sense integrated and dynamic peripheries of Asia and Latin America, potential new peripheries of eastern Europe, marginalised peripheries of the African and Islamic worlds – the useful police officer function excludes any serious attempt at democracy. Here, the theme of democracy is cynically invoked to shoot down an adversary (socialist or populist), but is never invoked against an ally or an agent. In this area, the double standard prevails. At times, however, the violence of the political crisis is such that it imposes an appearance of democracy of the type I have referred to as 'little, low-intensity democracy', pseudo-pluralist and pseudo-electoral, as a way of managing the 'transition'. The era of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes,

whether military, theocratic or other, is far from ended.

In developed capitalist countries the conflict between the aspirations of popular majorities and the results produced by current policies, the helplessness of states to deal with the forces unleashed by globalisation (a helplessness that is accepted and even willed by the classes that dominate the state) and frighteningly effective forms of media manipulation have produced a genuine crisis affecting the idea and practice of democracy.

Generally speaking, then actually existing contemporary capitalism works within a system of 'low intensity democracy'. Post-modernist ideology seeks to justify this situation by denigrating major struggles over fundamental choices and choosing instead to laud the management of daily life at ground level. The proliferation of NGOs is to a large extent an answer to this strategy of depoliticisation of the peoples of the world. Far from constituting the basic structure of a powerful civil society emerging to face the state, these reorganisations accompany the management of society by the dominant forces of capital. A strong civil society goes hand in hand with extensive politicisation, living and active class organisations (parties, trade unions and others), and a state that is strong because it is genuinely democratic. A weak state is the best vehicle for the weakening of democracy and civil society.

This management system cannot do without police officers capable of acting at the global level. In this respect, all dominant forces accept that the US (i.e. American military forces equipped with remote-controlled weapons of mass destruction) shall fulfil this function. There is no conflict between globalisation as it is proposed by these dominant forces of capital and American hegemony. Neither Japan, the European Community nor any of the countries that make up the community have any real ambition to reduce this power, even if at times, in some European countries, there is a feeling that "it would be nice if things were otherwise". The anti-state discourse is aimed at all states, except the US in its hegemonic political and military functions.

There is an overall political strategy of global management. This strategy is carried out by the US and supported by the triad. This point is certainly the object of controversies and contradictory analyses that need to be discussed. The debate should not be avoided under the pretext that the idea that our opponent has a coherent strategy is a return to some kind of stale 'conspiracy theory'. There is no conspiracy, but the adversary does have a general strategy.

In my opinion, the goal of this strategy is to maximise the fragmentation of potential anti-systemic forces by supporting the break-up of state forms of social organisation. Let

us have as many Slovenias and Chechenyas as possible! The use or indeed the manipulation of identity demands is highly appreciated in this context. The issue of community identity and specificity-ethnic, religious or other – is therefore one of the central issues that must be debated with the greatest possible seriousness and sense of responsibility, especially given the fact that in this area, situations as well as ideological and political positions are highly variable. Generalisation is a major pitfall that we must try to avoid.

The basic democratic principle implying genuine respect for diversity, whether national, ethnic, religious, cultural or ideological, must be fully respected. Diversity cannot be managed in any other way than through the sincere practice of democracy. Otherwise, it is doomed to become a weapon that the adversary can use or even manipulate for his own purposes.

Historically, left-wing, forces have often been deficient in this area – though not always, of course, and not to the extent that is often asserted today. One example, among others is Tito's Yugoslavia, which was practically a model of coexistence of nationalities on a genuinely equal footing. Romania, on the other hand, is a different story. In the third world of the Bandung era, national liberation movements often succeeded in uniting different ethnic and religious communities against the imperialist enemy, and the first generation of ruling classes in African states was often genuinely trans-ethnic. Rare, however, were the powers capable of managing this diversity democratically and maintaining achievements, when there were any. The weakness of their democratic propensities produced results as regrettable as their management of the other problems faced by their societies. Powerless to deal with the crisis when it came, the ruling classes resorted to desperate expedients and often played a key part in encouraging retreat into community as a way of prolonging their 'control' over the masses.

However, even in many authentic bourgeois democracies (and even if there are no others, that is no reason for not trying to make democracy advance) in which the fundamental freedoms are respected, community diversity has certainly not always been appropriately handled. Canada, Great Britain in Ireland, racism against black people in the democratic US (or in Brazil, which is not very democratic, the treatment of native people in Latin America (also generally not very democratic), provide a number of examples just as well as undemocratic regimes like those of the former USSR. Many other examples might be invoked. Therefore, we cannot neglect these very real problems or ignore the rights of oppressed peoples, even if the degree of oppression varies. We cannot

do otherwise than support perfectly legitimate aspirations to respect for diversity which actually existing systems fail to honour.

A serious debate on the issue of specificity and the culturalist ideology is therefore necessary. In my opinion (which many do not share), the success of culturalism is proportional to the deficiencies of democratic management of diversity. By culturalism I mean the assertion that these differences are 'paramount' and should be given 'priority' (over class differences, for example); they are sometimes even considered 'trans-historical', i.e. founded on historical invariants (this is often the case of religious culturalisms, which they easily slide towards obscurantism and fanaticism).

In order to see more clearly in the jungle of identity claims, I submit for discussion a criterion that strikes me as essential. Progressive movements are those whose demands combine with the struggle against social exploitation and for the extension of democracy in all dimensions. In our current phase, progressive movements are therefore, those that help open people's eyes to the reality of the societal project of globalised neo-liberal management, i.e. those that clearly refuse to support, tolerate or ignore the objectives of unbridled capitalist globalisation, the subjection of workers and peoples, 'low intensity' democratic management, support to authoritarian but docile regimes, etc. On the other hand, movements that claim to be 'without a social programme', (arguing that it is unimportant) or 'not hostile to globalisation' (equally unimportant of course!) – let alone the ones asserting that democracy (accused of being 'western') is foreign to them – are frankly reactionary, practically Fascist movements that perfectly serve the interests of dominant capital. Dominant capital, moreover, is aware of this and supports these movements, even as the media take advantage of their barbaric content to denounce the peoples who are their victims. These movements are used and in some cases even manipulated. In conclusion, I will revert here to the scenarios for the future that follow from the basic assumptions of the deployment of capital's project for globalised domination.

On the basis of what has been said above, multiple variations of the one big scenario are possible, e.g. (i) European variations: German Europe? With or without the euro? Latin-Americanisation of eastern Europe? Break-up (or downplaying) of the European Community?, etc. (ii) East Asian variations: Regional Asia-Pacific integration around Japan and the US? Regional integration of eastern Asia, minus Japan around China? Break-up of China?, etc.

The 'big' project, in any case, is already formulated in terms of neo-imperialist regionalisation (along the lines of 'sharing

the burden'), defining geostrategic southern spaces behind each of the powers constituting the triad: (i) US/Canada/Latin America (definition of this space has begun with the integration of Mexico through NAFTA). (ii) US/Israel/oil-producing countries of the Persian Gulf/Arab Mashrek. (iii) European Community/Maghreb/sub-Saharan Africa. (iv) European Community (or Germany)/eastern Europe, or, alternatively, Germany/US/eastern Europe/former USSR. (v) Japan/ASEAN or Japan/US/Asia-Pacific.

Here also, two observations probably deserve further discussion:

(i) Is the neo-imperialist project compatible with the emergence of about 15 regional and subregional poles enjoying 'privileges' in their region, but continuing to act as faithful relays under 'open' globalisation? Germany and Japan, America's brilliant seconds in command, immediately spring to mind. Others include Brazil in South America, Israel in the west Asia, South Africa in southern Africa, Turkey (and/or Iran) in western central Asia and Korea in eastern Asia; they are supported by second-rank regional powers such as Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, Pakistan and Malaysia.

(ii) Is it possible for some of the sub-regional poles to 'rebel' and extend their autonomy in conflict with globalisation/American hegemony? On what conditions? Brazil and the Mercosur initiative, for instance, might provide an example if Mercosur were to increase its distance from liberal dogmas.

In this general context, it is easy to imagine a new stage of capitalist expansion, based on the accelerated growth of active peripheries (China, east Asia, India, Latin America) and a renewal of growth in eastern Europe, the former USSR and the European Community, while the marginalised African and Islamic world is left to its convulsions. Intensified exchanges between the world's various dynamic regions would certainly support this project. However, in my view (which is not necessarily shared by all), the further we go in this direction, the more exchanges between the regions in question will intensify and the more the new polarisation founded on the triad's five monopolies will increase. In this perspective the disparities between regional levels of development would not decrease; on the contrary, the distance between the centres and the new periphery would widen.

There will be no lack of spoilsports to disrupt the deployment of the scenario in its diverse forms. For example: (i) A renewal of class struggles is foreseeable and already visible (France, 1995, Korea, January 1997). The movement will spread and progressively erode the power of dominant capital's offensive. It may thus prepare the conditions for the emergence of the alternative that we

will be considering in the fourth section of this document. (ii) The ruling classes and hegemonic blocs of certain countries may also act to inflect the model in a direction more favourable to them, thus enlarging their margin of autonomy. I am thinking firstly of China – especially if the social solidarity which endows its project with a marked national character should be reinforced by the intervention of currently excluded popular forces – but also of Korea, India and Brazil. There are probably other countries where this kind of evolution is possible.

OUTLINE OF AN ALTERNATIVE

Any alternative that is going to embody respect for the interests of workers and peoples must inevitably start with the reinforcement, through their struggles, of their power in their national societies. In the absence of such developments, discourse on alternatives remains a pious hope, an academic exercise entertained by intellectuals. 'Pleas' based on 'reason' or general interest, addressed to existing powers, will never have any effect, because the policies carried out by these powers are sufficiently rational and efficient from the point of view of the social interests they defend. The results they produce (unemployment, inequalities, exclusion) are their true objectives, while the rhetoric of politicians who deplore them is pure hypocrisy. Nor can we rely on the spontaneity of struggles in hopes that they will invent a coherent alternative of themselves.

A profoundly responsible discussion of the lineaments of an alternative is therefore, and will remain, indispensable for all analysts and actors of social change. Fortunately, debates of this type are numerous and often rich. However, they usually take place within a country or a region (Europe, Latin America, Arab world, Africa, etc) and for this reason the global dimension of problems and solutions is often missing. Other debates often present the opposite flaw: world problems are not related to national problems, which are ignored or simplified.

We must reject the idea, which there is currently an attempt to impose on public opinion, that globalisation is a take it or leave it proposition – take it as it is, in its unbridled form designed to answer the needs of large corporations, or leave it and choose confinement in some autarkic absurdity. Globalisation, like everything else, can be embodied in many possible alternative defined by the balance (or lack of balance) in the relationships between nations at any given moment, and, behind them, the specific internal social relations of these nations.

Just as the reinforcement of the popular classes is an absolutely necessary condition for the emergence of alternatives at the

national level, the reinforcement of peoples at the peripheries (active and marginalised) is essential within the world system. How can this be achieved? Certainly not through 'humanitarian' rhetoric (or interventions), nor through 'co-operation' as it is developed even in the most well-intentioned circles.

In this case, as in internal matters, we are dealing with power relationships that can be modified only by the parties involved, i.e., the countries of the peripheries, whether active or marginalised. I am suggesting that emphasis should be put on giving priority to the construction of large regional groups. However, these zones must not be defined as they are in the neo-imperialist project (as zones of specific responsibility for each member of the triad, i.e., as vehicles for unbridled globalisation), but, on the contrary, as blocs of resistance to globalisation, capable of forcing the renegotiation of north-south relationships. Obviously, we are all thinking of the Latin American, African, Arab, south-east Asian blocs, for no single country in these regions has enough weight to modify the heavy constraints imposed on it by unbridled globalisation. The only exceptions are continent/countries: China, India and perhaps Brazil or Russia. The regionalisation I am suggesting seems to me the only reasonable and effective way of opposing the polarising effects of the triad's five monopolies. Specifically on the basis of these five monopolies, it would be possible to define the essential orientations of the regionalisation projects I am suggesting, i.e., the priorities that the projects ought to serve.

Of course, the transformations of the international order, I am advocating, will become feasible only if, and to the extent that, the nature of power is itself transformed in the countries of the periphery as popular, national and democratic hegemonic blocs replace dominant comprador blocs.

At that point, it will be possible to look again at the major issues related to the world order in order to propose orientations and objectives for major negotiations that could organise a controlled interdependence, designed to serve the peoples of the world,

on the following major issues at least: (i) Renegotiation of 'market shares' and the rules of access to them. This project of course, challenges the rules of the WTO, which, behind the rhetoric of 'fair competition', is exclusively occupied with defending the privileges of oligopolies active at the world level. (ii) Renegotiation of the systems of capital markets, in order to end the domination of financial speculation operations and channel investment towards productive activities in the north and south. This project challenges the functions, and perhaps even the existence, of the so-called World Bank (it is actually the northern, and specifically the American Bank for the south). (iii) Renegotiation of monetary systems in order to set up regional arrangements and system ensuring the relative stability of exchange rates and organising their interdependence. This project challenges the IMF, the dollar standard and the principle of free and floating exchange rates. (iv) The beginning of a worldwide taxation system, involving, for instance, the taxation of rents derived from the exploitation of natural resources and their redistribution throughout the world according to appropriate criteria and for appropriate purposes. (v) The demilitarisation of the planet, beginning with the reduction of the most powerful forces of mass destruction. (iv) The democratisation of the UN through the creation of a second Assembly more representative of popular social forces within member countries.

Considered as a whole, the proposals outlined in the previous paragraphs embody a kind of programme for building economies that serve the peoples of the world.

Would this be a capitalist or a socialist economy? It is important to debate this point. My perception is that it would associate elements of both in an undeniably conflictual relationship, imposing a compromise at this stage between the assumptions of capitalism and those that are independent of capitalism (and that one may, if one so desires, describe as anti-systemic). This is a stage in the long transition from world capitalism to world socialism.

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