**Celebrating the love and vision of a communist of the heart – Samir Amin**

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It is with great joy that we celebrate Samir’s 85th birthday. Samir is a respected teacher and beloved friend. I recall, with fondness, our first acquaintance. We were both attending a conference organized by UBUNTU in Barcelona around the year 2000. Over breakfast, we happened to sit at the same table. Samir asked me where I was from. I said, Hong Kong. His eyes glistened, and he enthusiastically told me, you must link up with one excellent group in Hong Kong that has done a lot of good intellectual work, with a lot of good intellectuals. I listened in earnest. The name of the group is ARENA, Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives, he said. I told him, I am Co-Chair of ARENA. He burst out laughing, and that instant sealed our friendship and our sustained effort to work together in the World Forum for Alternatives, the Global University for Sustainability, and other global projects. Samir knows many senior fellows of ARENA, hence we also share common friendship with Muto Ichiyo, Mushakoji Kinhide, Surichai Wun’gaeo, Francis Loh, Samuel Lee, Vinod Raina, and many others.

In Samir’s company, we listen to wise and incisive analysis of the world’s crises and the challenges for movements, but we would not feel grim or pessimistic. Samir’s optimism is contagious. He would present his analysis in a persuasive manner, and always pointing to possibilities for action and hope. Now and again, he would crack a joke, either himself feeling like telling one, or on my request: Samir, a joke please! Even if it was not the first time I heard the joke, I would every time enjoy it as if it were new. Samir would start in a serious tone, as if he were to give a lecture; he would tell the joke with such affection that he would himself be most amused and laughing heartily before his listeners join in the jesting. Samir is such a person of integrity and dedication, with passion for life and the pleasures of life; his mockery of the idiocy and tyranny of dictators like Hosni Mubarak is grounded on his commitment to fight injustice, corruption and fraud in the region and in the world, and to make the world a better one for everybody.

The story I like best about Samir is his pride that he inclined towards communism at the age of 6, when his mother instilled in him a sense for social justice, seeing a child beggar in the street. Instead of pity for the child, he vaguely understood this as social injustice. Samir was blessed with the fine examples of his parents, both medical doctors, who gave Samir a linguistic and cultural education in French and Arabic, without chauvinism or inequality. The parents were well known to the people of Port Said in Egypt for their committed and generous health work. When Samir had to flee his country to escape from imminent arrest for his political activities, his father took him past friendly security guards to board a ship to seek refuge in Europe. What the parents plant, the children harvest.

Intellectuals in China know Samir well. Many of his books have been published in Chinese. He is known to love China and the Chinese people. Affectionately, Samir would speak of his footprints to all but one or two regions in China. He told me, in my interviews with him over the years, that he joined the communist party at the age of 17, and he was happily amazed by the energy of the Chinese revolution one year later. He was also much encouraged by the Vietnamese revolution that defeated France and the USA, which was an example of a “small” people defeating two powerful imperialist giants.

Samir is not an uncritical supporter for the Chinese or the Vietnamese revolutions. He sees the energy and the dynamics of the revolutions in resisting and thwarting imperialist aggression, and still hopes the sovereign states will play a prominent role in the geo-politics of today if they can refuse to succumb to the hegemonic politics of the Triad – the USA, Europe, and Japan. Samir looks at real politics with a critical eye: rather than “delinking” itself from global financial hegemons, and providing leadership as in the times of the non-aligned movement with the Bandung spirit, China, for example, has lost its popularity with African or Latin American countries in the last three decades because it is concerned with trade rather than solidarity. However, Samir would add that it is wrong to parallel China with the Triad, not only because China has been a victim of imperialist aggression and has only recently moved further away from the periphery, but also because China cannot deploy military power, like the Triad does, to impose its agenda or unequal terms of trade. Samir never criticizes for the sake of criticism; he always comes up with positive, viable recommendations. For example, he thinks that China, rather than sending manufactured goods to Africa, should support the industrialization of the African countries, assisting them on their path to economic and political sovereignty; China should offer political solidarity to African countries in the endeavor to build a long term alliance to counter the aggression and hegemony of the Triad; China should not reproduce relations of exploitation that exist between the capitalist core and the periphery, and should not compromise itself to the savagery of integration into capitalist globalization of dispossession through accumulation.

With the imperialist powers monopolizing technology, finances, natural resources, the media and weapons, and setting the agenda at the expense of the sovereignty and well-being of the peoples of developing countries, the strategy of delinking should guide the path for both sovereign states and the working masses of workers and peasants. Globalization of resistance by the people should go for self reliance in economic, political and cultural terms. Hence, the role of the peasants in defending their land, their water, and their small household agriculture is paramount to the delinking strategy. The fight for ecological justice, the defense of the commons for the sustainable livelihood of the people, is thus also an integral part of delinking from savage globalization. The majority of peasants in China and Vietnam still holding on to a piece of distributed land is an important gain of the socialist revolutions, hence Samir’s unflinching defense of such gains.

I have profound respect for Samir as a communist, with a vision and commitment for communism tenderly nurtured in his heart, his thought, and his deeds. At different points of his life, Samir has affiliated with various political parties – the Communist Party in France, or communist and socialist parties in Egypt. I find Samir not the least orthodox or dogmatic on the question of political parties. He has faith in the idea and not necessarily in the institution. He feels that one can at the same time be member of several political parties. Why not? Then comes his lovely grin. He keeps his friendship with many veteran communists even though he may not agree with some of their positions.

Samir is not only a great theorist and thinker, he is an activist organizer, for he sees organizing as a crucial means to defend and further the gains of social movements and socialist revolutions. He played a founding role in CODESRIA, Third World Forum, World Forum for Alternatives, and Global University for Sustainability. A prolific writer, but at the same time, he is so generous with his time in organizing, networking, sourcing funding, communicating with speakers and writers, and preparing for and writing reports on World Social Forums or international encounters. I have attended workshops and conferences with him in different parts of the globe -- Beijing, Xi’an, Chongqing, Hong Kong, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Hanoi, Mumbai, Dakar, Cairo, Tunis, Bamako, Nairobi, Algiers, Durban, Caracas, Porto Alegre, Barcelona, Madrid, Rome, Paris…. I have had the privilege to learn from his wisdom and erudition. The Three Gorges River Cruise in December 2012 as part of the South South Forum for Sustainability is one of the most memorable trips I had together with Samir and Isabelle – good food, happy singing, gorgeous scenery, and deep discussions and debates. I regret I missed the Nile River cruise to celebrate Samir’s 80th birthday in September 2011, organized by his friends. During the cruise, every day, Samir gave lectures on the theme of value, and acted as the local guide for the places the cruise visited along the Nile River. I can imagine him explaining the historical sites along the River, proud as an Egyptian, son of a country with a long history of civilization but sadly violated by the plunders and devastations from the imperialist powers, and today ruptured by dictators, fundamentalists, and neo-liberals.

In the face of a world running its course along various lines of injustice, privatizing social wealth produced by the people at the expense of people’s health, well being and even their lives, life cannot but resist to gain its liberation and sovereignty over itself. There is no place for despair but only calls for action. Hence, in Samir’s vocabulary, the word “despair” does not exist. He remains a militant for the cause of communism, struggling against barbarism, struggling for authentic democracy with social progress, for a socialist perspective in social transformations, and for humanity.

Note: Lau Kin Chi’s interview with Samir Amin in Beijing, October 2015, published on Global University for Sustainability.

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