

SAMIR AMIN ; From Bandung (1955) to 2015 ; Old and new challenges for the States, the Nations and the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America

A- The global frame, the longer view

1. Bandung and the Movement of Non Aligned Countries (NAM)

The Conference of Bandung declared the will of the Asian and African nations to reconquer their sovereignty and complete their independence through a process of authentic independent consistent development to the benefit of all labouring classes. In 1955 most of the Asian and Middle East countries had reconquered their sovereignty in the aftermath of World War II, while movements of liberation were in struggle elsewhere, in Africa in particular to achieve that goal.

As recalled by the leaders of Bandung the conference was the first international meeting of « non European » (so called « coloured ») nations whose rights had been denied by historical colonialism/imperialism of Europe, the US and Japan. In spite of the differences in size, cultural and religious backgrounds and historical trajectories, these nations rejected together the pattern of colonial and semi colonial globalisation that the Western powers had built to their exclusive benefit. But Bandung also declared the will of Asian and African nations to complete the reconquest of their sovereignty by moving into a process of authentic and accelerated inward looking development which is the condition for their participating to the shaping of the world system on equal footing with the States of the historic imperialist centres.

As President Soekarno said in his address, the conference associated countries which had made different choices with respect to the ways and means to achieve their developmental targets. Some (China, North Vietnam, North Korea) had chosen what they named « the socialist road », inspired by Marxism. Other conceived national and popular specific ways combined with social progressive reforms (what could be named « national/ popular » projects ; Soekarno's Indonesia, Nehru's India, Nasser's Egypt and later many other countries are examples). All these countries gave priority to the diversification and industrialisation of their economies, moving out of their confinement to remain producers/exporters of agricultural and mining commodities. All of them considered that the State had to assume a major responsibility in the control of the process. They also considered that their targets (in particular their moving into the industrial era) could eventually conflict with the dominant logics of the global system ; but that they were in a position which allowed them to successfully compel the global system to adjust to their demands. Yet a number of countries which joined NAM did not adopt a definite position with respect to that matter, and considered possible pursuing development in the frame of the deployment of the global system.

What ought to be recalled here is that all the countries of Asia and Africa benefited from the very existence of NAM, whatever had been their choices. Political solidarity initiated by Bandung paid, in economic terms. A country like Gabon for instance would not have been able to capture a good part of the oil rent if not OPEC and NAM which made it possible. The stress was therefore put on that political solidarity and NAM countries supported unanimously the struggles (including armed struggles) of the peoples of remaining colonies (Portuguese colonies, Zimbabwe), and against apartheid in South Africa and occupied Palestine.

The history of NAM until the 1980s has been the history of internal political and social struggles within each country precisely around the axis as defined above : what is an alternative efficient strategy for political, social and economic meaningful development ? These struggles combined with the conflicts operating in the international arena, mainly the East/West conflict. Yet in no way should the initiatives taken in Bandung and their deployment by NAM be considered as a misadventure of the Cold War, as presented by the Western medias, yesterday and to day. The Soviet Union sided with NAM and to

various degrees supported the struggles conducted in Asia and Africa, particularly in response to the Western economic and sometimes military aggressions. The reason for that is simply that Soviet Union and China were also excluded from the eventual benefit of participating to a truly balanced pluricentric pattern of global system. In contrast the Western powers fought NAM by all means. Therefore the view expressed by the Western medias that NAM has lost its meaning with the end of the cold war, the breakdown of Soviet Union in 1990 and the move of China out of the Maoist road, is meaningless : the challenge that unequal globalisation represents remains. Bandung and NAM were fought by the imperialist countries. Coups d'Etat were organised by local reactionary forces, supported by foreign interventions that put an end to a number of Bandung inspired State systems and national popular experiences (in Indonesia, Egypt, Mali, Ghana and many other countries). The growing internal contradictions specific to the concept of historical soviet and maoist socialisms, as well as the contradictions specific to each of the various national popular experiences prepared the ground for the counter offensive of the imperialist Triad.

The achievements during the Bandung and NAM era have been tremendous and historically positive, whatever have been their limits and shortcomings. The view that « Bandung failed », as expressed in the Western medias, is simply non sense. Yet what ought to be said in this respect is that Bandung and NAM's systems, in spite of their achievements, were not able to move beyond their limits and therefore gradually lost breath, eroded and finally lost their content.

2. A world without Bandung and NAM (1980-2010)

In Algiers in 1974 NAM formulated a consistent and reasonable programme (the New International Economic Order) that invited the countries of the North to adjust to the needs requested for the pursuing of the development in the South. These proposals were entirely rejected by the Western powers. The targets of the counter offensive of the imperialist triad were formulated in 1981 at the Cancun G7 meeting, when Reagan declared that « we know what they need better than they do themselves ». He meant unilateral structural adjustments, dismantling of the national productive systems, privatisations and opening to financial plunder and pillage of natural resources, i.e. the « Washington consensus ».

No need to recall the tragic consequences associated to the deployment of the new imperialist global order for the societies of the three continents : on the one hand the super exploitation of cheap labour in delocalised industries controlled by multinationals and sub contracting locally owned industries and services, on the other hand the plunder of the local natural resources to the exclusive benefit of maintaining affluence and waste in the societies of the North. These resources do not consist only of oil, gas and minerals, but include growingly agricultural land (« land grabbing »), forest, water, atmosphere and sun. In that respect the ecological dimension of the challenge has now come to the forefront. Such a pattern of « lumpen development » has generated a dramatic social disaster : growing poverty and exclusion, transfer of rural dispossessed to shanty towns and miserable informal survival activities, unemployment, particularly of youth, oppression of women etc. National consistent productive systems which had started to be constructed in the Bandung era are systematically dismantled, embryos of reasonable public services (health, education, housing, transport) destroyed.

Protest against these miseries is not enough. The processes which have created these regressions need to be understood ; and no efficient response to the challenge can be formulated without a rigorous analysis of the transformations of capitalism in the centres of the system, i.e. the processes of concentration of capital and centralisation of its control, of financialisation. In such circumstances the conventional means of measuring development have lost meaning : a society stricken by this pattern of lumpen development can still enjoy in some cases high rates of growth, based on plunder of resources, associated to a trickle down effect restricted to the enrichment of a small minority. Simultaneously the centralised control of the productive system by financialised monopoly capital has resulted into its control of political life by oligarchies, annihilating the meaning of representative democracy.

Yet, in the frame of that global disaster, some societies of the South have been able to take advantage of the new global order of deepened globalisation, and even seem to be « emerging » in that frame as successful exporters of manufactured goods. These successes feed in their turn the illusion that such a

process, respectful of the fundamentals of capitalist accumulation and globalised markets, can be maintained. An analysis of the growing conflicts between these successful emerging economies and the imperialist triad (over the the access to natural resources in particular) needs to be considered, as well as an analysis of the internal imbalances associated to these processes.

The social disaster produces a no less dramatic political disaster. NAM had succeeded in the past to maintain a degree of polycentrism in the management of international politics, which has been destroyed by globalised neo liberalism. The legitimacy of the international community represented by the UN, NAM, G77 plus China, has been abolished to the benefit of a self appointed so called “international community” restricted to the G7 and a small number of selected “friends” (in particular Saudi Arabia and Qatar, not exactly models of democratic republics!). Financial, economic and eventually military interventions are orchestrated by this so called “international community”, denying again the sovereign rights of all the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

3. Towards a revival of the Bandung spirit and reconstruction of a front of countries Non Aligned on globalisation

The first wave of revival of States and nations of Asia and Africa which shaped major changes in the history of humankind organised itself in the Bandung spirit in the frame of countries Non Aligned on colonialism and neo colonialism, the pattern of globalisation at that time. Now, the same nations, as well as those of Latin America and the Caribbean, are challenged by neo liberal globalisation, which is no less imbalanced by nature. Therefore they must unite to face the challenge successfully as they did in the past. They will, in that perspective, feed a new wave of revival and progress of the three continents.

NAM united together nations of Asia and Africa only. States of Latin America, with the exception of Cuba, abstained from joining the organisation. Reasons for that failure have been recorded: 1) Latin American countries were formally independent since the beginning of the 19 th century and did not share the struggles of Asian and African nations to reconquer their sovereignty, 2) the US domination of the continent through the Monroe doctrine was not challenged by any of the State powers in office (except Cuba); the Organisation of American States included the master (the US) and was qualified for that reason by Cuba as “the Ministry of colonies of the US”, 3) the ruling classes, of “European extract”, looked at Europe and the US as models to be copied. For those reasons the attempt to build a “Tricontinental” did not succeed: it was joined only by movements in struggle (often armed struggle), but rejected by all State powers on the continent at that time.

That has changed: 1) the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have recently established their own organisation (CELAC, Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), excluding the US and Canada, and therefore formally rejected the Monroe doctrine, 2) the new popular movements have created a consciousness of the plurinational character of their societies (Indian American, European extract, African ancestors), 3) these movements have also initiated strategies of liberation from the yoke of neo liberalism, with some success that may surpass in some respects what has been achieved elsewhere in the South. Therefore the revival of NAM must now include them and become a Tricontinental front.

The axis around which States and nations of the three continents should organise their solidarity in struggle can be formulated as building a common front against neo liberal unbalanced imperialist globalisation.

We have seen that the States which met in Bandung hold different views with respect to the ways and means to defeat imperialist domination and advance in the construction of their societies; yet they were able to overcome those differences in order to face successfully the common challenge. Same to day. Ruling powers in the three continents as well as popular movements in struggle differ to a wide extent on the ways and means to face the renewed same challenge.

In some countries “sovereign” projects are developed which associate active State policies aiming at constructing systematically a national integrated consistent modern industrial productive system, supported by an aggressive export capacity. Views with respect to the degree, format and eventual

regulation of opening to foreign capital and financial flows of all kinds (foreign direct investments, portfolio investments, speculative financial investments) differ from country to country and from time to time. Policies pursued with respect to the access to land and other natural resources also offer a wide spectrum of different choices and priorities.

We find similar differences in the programmes and actions of popular movements in struggle against the power systems in office. Priorities cover a wide spectrum : democratic rights, social rights, ecological care, gender, economic policies, access of peasants to land etc. In some few cases attempts are made to bring together those different demands into a common strategic plan of action. In most cases little has been achieved in that perspective.

Such a wide variety of situations and attitudes do create problems for all ; and may even generate conflicts between States and /or between partners in struggle.