

What future for the United Nations?

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It is good form today to say that the UN has gone bankrupt and that it is henceforth the duty of the G7/8 and even of NATO to ensure the 'security' of the international order, and even its 'democratization'! On the contrary, in this document I will demonstrate how the UN is the victim of a plot whose aim is no less than to assassinate it. To demonstrate this, we must take a look at both the UN – in the past as well as its present state of crisis – and the strategic political options taken by the ruling powers in their real perspective, based on the analysis of the challenges of the 21st century.

Market/State conflict and coincidence in their first expressions

- The space defining the sphere of reproduction of a society is always multidimensional: it is that of its political management, its economic life and the expression of its cultural identity. The consistency of a society therefore depends on the degree of coincidence of these various spaces – political, economic and cultural. This coincidence operates at times in a relatively large geographical sphere or, on the contrary, is dispersed, being effective only on the level of micro companies in villages, for instance.

The coincidence in question does not exclude the possibility of contradictions and conflicts between the internal logic particular to the different authorities of the social reality considered (political, economic and cultural). Quite on the contrary, it is the unfurling of these contradictions that reveals the dynamic of history and social transformations.

In any case, the coincidence in question is always relative, in the sense that the societies defined on its basis only rarely unfurl in an absolute or nearly absolute autarchy, but are usually in line with 'society systems'. The spheres of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Confucianism, for example, define cultural dimensions (religious and philosophic) common to all societies. By the same token, one can observe the spheres of commercial exchange that associate many societies to one another, which become more or less interdependent due to this exchange. In modern capitalism, this sphere is constituted by the entire planet,

lending the economic authority of social reproduction its quality of 'world economy'. Yet in previous periods, there were also vast spaces of exchange, such as those designated by the 'silk routes', for instance.

The nebula constituted by interdependent human societies reveals, in some of its constituent areas, strong agglomerations lending the societies located in these areas an evident consistence that identifies them. One could then, for the societies in question, speak about a coincidence of 'market' (a disputably simplistic term for designating the economic aspect)/State (sphere of political power management)/society (recognizing itself in a cultural identity) aspects.

- Capitalism was first successful in a particular region of the Old World – the small, north-western corner of Europe. It had precedents elsewhere, but it was there that it took its 'definitive' historical form, spreading (or attempting to spread) elsewhere.

Now, the region in question was characterized by a high degree of dispersion of both its conditions of economic reproduction (largely limited to those of the subsistence of the fief) and those of its political management (equally largely limited to the powers of the local lord). The vaster spaces of which the base feudal units were a part continued to have a weak density: the shared 'Christianity' was not accompanied by real political power, exercised by neither its head (the Pope), nor the Emperor (of the Holy Roman Empire) nor Kings; commercial exchange remained limited in its effects (and in any case, the 'long distance' type of exchange – the 'Silk Routes' – predominated in comparison with local commercial exchange). Precisely for this reason, I have qualified this ('feudal') form of society of 'tributary' families in the periods in question as a 'peripheral' form, as opposed to centralized forms characterized by an economy/power (operating in considerably larger areas) coincidence. The precocious coagulation of new capitalist forms in these peripheral areas of the tributary world seems to me not to be purely by chance.¹

- At first, during the period of its initial coagulation, the intensification of commercial exchange unfurled in what I call the chaos of the origins of capitalism. The coincidence between spaces of political management and economic reproduction was broken. Juxtaposed to the ancient feudal powers and the limited powers of guilds were the commercial networks that transcended them. The map of Europe of this transitional period from the Middle Ages to modern times took the form of a puzzle of principalities, lordships and free towns, all of them increasingly dependent on the network of merchants that escaped their power. This model contrasts with that of centralized tributary worlds characterized by the submission of the commercial economy to political powers,² a major handicap to the emergence of fully developed capitalist forms.

The chaos was overcome and the 'market/State' coincidence (economic and political) was reconstructed through the emergence of the modern Nation-State. The United Provinces, above all England and France, invented the Absolute Monarchy of the Ancien Régime which paved the way for the spread that would reach its zenith in the 19th century, producing the 'model' par excellence of the organization of the modern world.

This model has entered a phase of final disintegration that excludes all possibilities of reversal, as we will see later. A return to chaos under conditions that comprise a new challenge: that of going beyond capitalism, which has become obsolete.

- The establishment of the UN occurred precisely during the long phase characterized by 'market/State' coincidence (management of the economy/management of politics). It was its late culmination. The philosophy of this world system was based, in effect, on two principles: the absolute sovereignty of States (considered by nature as 'Nation-States') and polycentrism. They were to constitute the foundation of the United Nations Charter. We will later write up the balance sheet (with positive results – it is far from being negative as is too often and too quickly asserted today) for this world system, though without ignoring the limits and increasing contradictions that have led to its contemporary crisis.

The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) inaugurated the establishment of this system based on the dual recognition of the sovereignty of States and polycentrism. The system was then only specific to the space of Old World Catholicism, whose unity was broken by the explosion of the Reformation. It was generalized throughout Europe by the Treaty of Vienna (1815) and was first made partially universal by the creation of the League of Nations (1920). I say partially universal because the League of Nations did not question the colonial statutes that excluded Asia and Africa. The League of Nations remained an organization representing a world system reduced to its centres (Europe and Japan), amputated from the United States (which distanced itself after having been the main promoter) and flanked by the peripheral area of 'independent' Latin America. The UN was conceived from the beginning in an authentically universal perspective, which would rapidly become a reality with the regained independence, firstly, of the countries of Asia and the Arabic world, and then of Africa.

Hence it is not surprising that the apogee of the United Nations was precisely during this relatively brief period that, from the early 1960s to 1975–1980, coincided with the so-called 'decades of development', which I will discuss later.

The doubts and the crisis that followed were not those of the UN, but of the world system in which the organization was inscribed. Because, as one will see later, discord between the different authorities of world management (especially between its economic dimensions – the ‘market’, in simplistic terms – and its political dimensions) has reappeared, following upon two or three centuries of coincidence, though limited to the central regions of the system. Yet discordance is no longer of a nature analogous to that characterizing the chaos of the beginning. The new chaos is that of a system henceforth obsolete.³ It cannot be overcome by the reestablishment of previous forms of coincidence. It requires the revision of all the data of the challenge on its local (‘national’) level, but also on that of the world system (and any possible regional sub-systems).

Just as the solution to these problems on the local (‘national’) scale cannot be found through a ‘return’ to practices institutionalized by the capitalism of the previous stage and, likewise, the UN crisis (one of the major dimensions of the crisis of the globalized management system which we are discussing here) cannot be overcome by maintaining the functions that brought the organization success and glory in the period after World War II.

Balance sheet of the actions of the United Nations (1945–1980)

- World War II ended with a double victory, that of democracy over fascism and that of the peoples of Asia and Africa over colonialism. The creation of the UN must thus be understood in the context of this atmosphere.

This double victory commanded the economic, social and political forms of the management of systems both on their national levels and on the international organization level. It established the three fundamental ‘historical social commitments’ of the time: the Welfare State in the West, a work/capital commitment that allowed the working classes who were victorious over fascism access to a degree of dignity unknown in the previous stages of capitalism, really existing socialism and that which I call the national populisms in the countries of Asia and Africa that had gained independence.⁴

At the same time, it opened the way for a negotiated political management of international relations, likewise promoting the role of the United Nations. It is good form today to say that the bipolarity of the Cold War and the powers of veto (of the five, but especially the two superpowers) have ‘paralysed’ the UN. Far from this and on the contrary, the bipolarity reinforced by the veto gave the countries on the

periphery of the system (Asia, Africa and Latin America) a margin to manoeuvre that they lost later. For a time the imperialist centres were forced to 'adjust' to the demands for respect of the sovereignty of the peoples in question and accept (or collaborate with) their projects for national and social development.

The significance of this positive change can be grasped once one has understood that globalized capitalist expansion has always been, throughout all stages of its spreading and from the start (the centuries of mercantilism, 1500–1800), imperialist by nature. That is, its immanent – and dominating – internal logic has generated a polarization of power and wealth on the planetary scale without parallel to anything throughout the preceding millennia of history. This permanent dominant tendency of really existing capitalism (which the discourse of 'liberalism' deliberately ignores in order to substitute it with a veritable mythology that the acrobats of simplistic economy attempt to present as reality) was, if not called into question in a radical manner, at least tempered during the period I have labelled as 'Bandung' (1955–1975). The rise – and glory days – of the United Nations coincide with this period, and this is not by chance.

- It is not difficult to draw up the (positive) balance sheet of the period: the highest economic 'growth' rates of all modern times, enormous social progress, both in the centres of the system and countries of really existing socialism and in the great majority of those on the liberated periphery, as well as a blossoming of modern national identities and new pride. No more difficult than it is to identify the limits and contradictions, to which we will later return.

The United Nations accompanied these upheavals and facilitated their realization. The double principle of national sovereignty and polycentrism constituted an effective means. On the political level, the UN banned the brutal interventions that had been commonly practised by the former imperialisms and which have once again become common practices since NATO invested itself with the responsibility of imposing its order on the Planet. On the level of economic management, the UN imposed the principle of negotiation, the Nation-States remaining free – on their territories – to organize their systems of production and distribution of wealth as they deemed appropriate. Certainly, the 'pessimists' will state that the negotiations in question (among others, for instance, through the UNCTAD) have rarely resulted in anything more than declarations with no real effect. Nonetheless, the States continued to be sovereign – on the internal level – and therefore they had real power of negotiation, of which they made the use that their ruling classes wished.

- Yet it is quite as easy to identify the limitations of this system. In the first place, observe that the system makes no reference to democracy apart from purely verbal reference. Today peoples have become more demanding in this aspect – though to differing degrees – than they had been in the period of the Welfare State, really existing socialism or national populisms. I certainly consider this evolution positive, even if the democratic demands in question remain the object of manipulations that are at times facile by the imperialist powers. In the spirit of the period, absolute sovereignty was that of the States, considered as exclusive representatives of their people. At the time, the denial of democracy was often justified by the ruling classes on behalf of the requirements of ‘building the nation’.

With the reversal of the economic situation, the slowed economic growth has put an end to the repercussions from which large segments of the population (especially the middle class, but also the working class, to the extent to which the social rise of young generations actually functioned) benefited. Suddenly, the ‘national’ discourse lost the legitimacy that allowed it to ignore democratic rights and even fundamental human rights.

In the second place, observe that the concepts of economic and social development themselves were based on the postulates of the paradigm of the time, founded on the market/State coincidence, or more generally speaking, management of the economy/exercise of political power. The concept of economic development was in keeping with a capitalist expansionist logic characterized by ‘recouping’, which in turn presupposed the ‘neutrality of technologies’ and the reproduction of hierarchical modes of organization produced by the historic processes of capitalism. The fact that this model has always involved at least an active regulating role of the State, at times substituting the absent capitalist (or ‘compradorisé’ capitalist, i.e. dependent on foreign capital) class, which here and there – and to differing degrees – has taken on social dimensions, does not lend it the quality of socialist that it has often too hastily been ascribed (which is why I prefer to qualify it as a populist national model).

Furthermore, this form of development was in line with the capitalist globalization of the time. Yet this alignment was founded on the negotiation of its conditions. The ‘decades of development’ that were the glory of the United Nations actively supported the deployment of these strategies at the time.

It goes without saying that, precisely for this reason – because they were within an ultimately capitalist perspective, both in the logic of internal social relations of the nations concerned and in the logic of globalized

expansion – the development projects of the time must have quickly reached their limits. The accumulation of contradictions that their implementation involved necessarily had to lead to the erosion of their efficiency and thus pave the way for the imperialist offensive and the reversal of the economic situation.

- Through its political actions of protection and respect for national sovereignties and support for polycentrism, the United Nations positively contributed to allowing the implementation of these experiments. And the political regimes that assumed the responsibility, though not democratic (or at best, democratic to a very low degree), were not in general as ‘horrible’ as is often asserted today. Modernizers, open to laicization, promoting the social rise of women (within limits ...), these autocracies were often close to forms of ‘enlightened despotism’. The most horrible regimes that existed at the time were for the most part put into place or supported by the imperialist adversary, which did not hesitate to do this whenever it could: Mobutu in Zaire, Suharto in Indonesia and the dictatorships of South America are all testimony to this. The subsequent events of history – including the support of the Taliban in Afghanistan (here, an obscurantist dictatorship succeeded enlightened despotism, too hastily qualified as ‘communist’) – testifies to the decline that followed the erosion of national populisms.
- Criticism today directed at the United Nations actions in that period does not generally take into account the overall reality of the time. This type of criticism thus remains superficial, placing an emphasis, for instance, on the ‘mediocrity’ of the ‘UN bureaucracy’. A tranquil comparison between the UN apparatus and that of other national or transnational institutional systems (such as the European Union apparatus, for instance) would invite more qualified conclusions.⁵

In retrospect, it is more seriously legitimate to place an emphasis on the illusions generated by the success of development at the time. But that which is certainly not legitimate is the use of this ‘failure’ as an instrument by the neo-liberals. Because what they imposed thereafter was an even more devastating illusion: that the deployment of deregulated capitalism would assure a ‘better’ development. An illusion associated with a dogmatic rhetoric refuted by the entire history of really existing capitalism (development, even in the limited sense of catching up in the system, whenever it occurred, always occurred via strategies accepting the conflict with the dominating logic of expansion of the dominating globalized capital) and cruelly refuted by the events of the past two decades, characterized by stagnation (development was sent through the trap door, substituted by the discourse of inefficient charity

– the ‘struggle against poverty’) and by the most scandalous aggravation of social injustices.

It is not at all surprising that under these conditions, democratization and peace were, like development, sent through the trap door, despite the resounding rhetoric of the representatives of the ruling powers. The debate that should emerge in response to liberal chaos concerns is the necessary democratization in its relation with social progress. It is replaced by a series of empty discourses designed to dispose of the real problems: the discourse of ‘good governance’ (accompanied by insipid developments concerning the ‘struggle against corruption’!), substituted for the analysis of the reality of powers, the promotion of communitarisms under the fallacious pretext of respect for the right to difference, the so-called ‘postmodernist’ bric-a-brac, the discourse on the supposed civilization conflicts (which substitutes the real debate concerning the conflict of political cultures, which we will discuss later). It is easy to recognize the trademark indicating the source of this discourse: the US department of propaganda. We know how these discourses are relayed by the World Bank (the ministry of propaganda of the G7, as I call the institution) and imposed upon the United Nations (which admittedly does not put up much of a fight). Insofar as the promised peace, it takes the form of permanent warfare (supposedly against ‘terrorism’!), repeated aggressions by Washington and its allies (‘preventive’ wars), and civil wars produced by the disintegration of States and societies subject to the treatment of liberalism!

- The United Nations has been invested with an unprecedented task of supreme importance: ensuring peace, condemning recourse to warfare (and preventing it insofar as possible).

The spirit of the United Nations Charter implies a polycentric view of globalization. This is understood as the forms of globalization that are based on the principle of negotiation, the only guarantee of authentic respect for diversity in all of its dimensions: cultural and linguistic, certainly, but also those that are the historical product of the inequalities of economic development. Polycentrism respects all States, all nations, be they ‘large’ or ‘small’, accepts that each of them, in a way, constitutes a centre in and of itself, and that therefore the interdependence involved in globalization must be able to handle the legitimate demands of the ‘self-centred’ viewpoints of all of its partners. Globalization is thus ‘negotiated’ and, if not perfectly egalitarian, at least conceived to reduce inequalities and not to favour their growth. Reconciling *de facto* differences on the one hand, and the universal demands for peace, democracy and development in solidarity on the other; this is the challenge.

Moreover, in the perspective of affirmation of polycentrism, the Charter of Nations has gone quite far, to the point of condemning the very principle of war, which is only accepted in case of legitimate defence, the aggressor being condemned without hesitation. The only legitimate military interventions are those ordered by the UN and conducted under its operational and political command. And these should in any case be measured and provisional.

The balance sheet of the implementation of these principles by the UN until the Gulf War (1991) shows rather positive results. The United Nations lent legitimacy to the wars of liberation against (British, Dutch, French, Belgian, Portuguese) colonialisms and thereby provided positive support to polycentric construction. In comparison with what occurred thereafter, there were few 'civil wars' during that period; and if, as has always been the case in history, certain powers have sought to take advantage of this and throw fuel on the fire, the United Nations system did not favour their manoeuvres (as reflected in the case of the War of Biafra). Certainly, the United Nations have perhaps been at times manipulated (this was the case in the War of Korea), or neutralized (in the US war against Vietnam or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan). In the Palestinian issue, it is true that the United Nations legitimized the creation of Israel in a highly disputable manner (authorizing the Zionists not to apply the plan for sharing), but they later attempted to put a brake on the expansionist ambitions of Tel Aviv: the tripartite aggression of 1956 was condemned, and by Resolution 242, it condemned the occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 as well.

The responsibilities I held at the time in the 1960s and 1970s led me to frequently attend the General Assemblies of the United Nations, held every year in New York in September. It was a major event every time, followed by the highest political figures the world over. That is to say, even if the positions expressed by the different participants did not always allow for a positive compromise to be found, these positions had to be taken into account by everyone.

The UN did not therefore die a natural death; it was assassinated in 1990–1991 by a decision of the United States, supported by its allies of the triad, putting an end to its responsibilities in managing and guaranteeing peace. The UN was assassinated by Washington's decision to implement its project – that is, to extend the Monroe Doctrine throughout the entire Planet.

This project, which I would qualify without hesitation as insane and criminal for its implications, was not born in President Bush Junior's mind. It is a project that the ruling classes of the United States have nourished since 1945.

The project has always assigned a decisive role to its military dimension. It was conceived after Potsdam, based on the nuclear monopoly. Very

quickly, the United States implemented a global military strategy, divided the Planet into regions and assigned the responsibility of controlling each of them to a 'US Military Command'. I refer you to my writings on this issue.⁶ Even before the USSR collapsed, and on the priority position occupied by the Middle East in this global strategic vision, the objective was not only to 'surround the USSR' (and China), but also to have the means to make Washington the master, as a last resort, of all regions of the Planet. In other words, to extend throughout the entire Planet the Monroe Doctrine, which effectively gives the United States the exclusive 'right' to manage the ensemble of the New World according to what they define as their 'national interests'.

The project implies that the 'sovereignty of national interests of the United States' be placed above all other principles structuring political behaviour considered as 'legitimate' means; it develops a systematic mistrust with regard to all supranational law. Certainly, the imperialisms of the past behaved no differently and those who seek to attenuate the responsibilities – and the criminal behavior – of the United States establishment at present, and to find 'excuses' for them, take up this same argument – that of indisputable historical antecedents.

Yet this is precisely what one would have wanted to see change in history and which has been in progress since 1945. It was because the conflict of imperialisms and the disregard of international law by fascist powers had produced the horrors of World War II that the UN was founded on a new principle proclaiming the illegitimate nature of war. The United States, you could say, not only made this principle its own, but was by far the precocious initiator. At the end of World War I, Wilson advocated restructuring international policy precisely on the basis of principles other than those that, according to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), gave the sovereignty of the monarchical States and then of the more or less democratic Nations its absolute character, called into question by the disaster to which it has led modern civilization. Little does it matter that the vicissitudes of domestic US policy postponed the implementation of these principles. F. D. Roosevelt, and even his successor, H. Truman, certainly played a decisive role in the new concept of multilateralism and the condemnation of the war accompanying it, which is the basis of the Charter of the United Nations.

This excellent initiative – backed by the peoples of the entire world at the time – which effectively represented a qualitative leap forward and opened a path for the progress of civilization, nevertheless never enjoyed the conviction of the ruling classes of the United States. The Washington authorities always felt ill at ease with the UN entente and today brutally proclaim what they had previously found themselves constrained to conceal: that they do not accept the very concept of an international law superior to

what they consider to be the demands of defence of their 'national interests'. I do not believe it is acceptable to find excuses for this return to the vision that the Nazis had developed in their time, demanding the destruction of the League of Nations. The plea in favour of law made with talent and elegance by Villepin at the Security Council is not, in this sense, a 'nostalgic look back at the past', rather on the contrary, a reminder of what the future should be. It was the United States that, on that occasion, defended a past that had been proclaimed definitively outdated.

The United States is not solely responsible for this downfall. Europe has generally participated, throwing fuel on the fire in Yugoslavia (through its hasty recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia), then by a realignment with the positions taken by the United States concerning 'terrorism' and the waging of war in Afghanistan. It remains to be known whether, after the War in Iraq, Europe will embark upon a revision of its positions. In any case, the return to the principle of polycentrism and the restoration of the role of the United Nations will not be on the agenda as long as Europe accepts the substitution of the UN by NATO (!) as a means of managing globalization.

The new challenge of the 'market/society' conflict

Contemporary chaos is not analogous to the chaos that prevailed during the formation of capitalism. By the same token, the responses to the contemporary challenge cannot be similar to those that were given by the construction in the past of the 'market/State' coincidence.

In its time, this construction had certainly constituted a real social advance that accompanied the deployment of the superior capitalist mode. Today, capitalism has exhausted its historic role as a progressive force and can offer nothing but its barbarous downfall. The challenge compels us to think of a situation 'beyond capitalism' and based on focusing analysis on the conflict between the economy (the 'market', that is, capitalism) and society. This conflict concerns all the dimensions of reality, both national and global. One cannot, therefore, make proposals regarding the role that one would like to have assigned to the United Nations without having first clarified the nature of the challenge confronting humanity.

In order to do so, we will necessarily have to make a digression and examine the two sets of issues concerning: (i) the nature of liberal chaos and the illusions developed in this regard; and (ii) what I call the conflict of political cultures in the face of this chaos.

This digression is indispensable, and without it, the proposals concerning the UN which I will develop in the final section of this paper would make no sense.

Chaos and 'liberal' illusions

Having already expressed my opinion on these matters in some detail, I will be brief:

- We are confronted today with a single project for the future, implemented through the systematic use of violence (including military violence) by the dominating powers, themselves at the service of the dominating segments of globalized capital.

This project – which is the only possible project of ‘really existing capitalism’ that has reached its current state of natural development according to its immanent internal logic – has nothing to do with the project that the ‘liberal’ discourse describes in terms of the market rule (both ‘competitive and transparent’), of democracy promoted by the substitution of the ‘civil society’ for the State (‘bureaucratic’ or even ‘autocratic’), guarantor of peace (on the sole condition that a stop be put to practices of savage ‘terrorism’ ...). This discourse is empty.

This project is that of the dominating segments of globalized capital (the ‘transnationals’ of the imperialist triad). I have qualified the future that it envisages for the majority of humanity as ‘apartheid on a global scale’.⁷ Permanent warfare against the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America is therefore considered an inevitable necessity of its gradual success. In this perspective, obviously, the United Nations can no longer have a role to play: either they accept becoming one of the docile instruments of those who conduct permanent warfare against the ‘South’, or they must disappear.

The only questions to be asked here are who will direct the camp of barbarianism and to the benefit of whom?

The answer to this question is already evident from the events: the United States put itself in that position by its unilateral decision. I have moreover proposed an analysis of the situation that governed this option, placing the emphasis simultaneously on the elements of power that are its source (the enormous destructive military capacity of the United States) and on its military vulnerability (limited military combat capacity) and economic vulnerability (a deficit that, should it fail to be ‘spontaneously’ funded by the entire world, will have to be tapped in the form of an authentic tribute). For all of these reasons, this choice is not only that of the American extreme right wing behind Bush Jr., it is also that of the democrat opposition. The latter would be far better disposed to reformulate the methods of implementation and to make some concessions (to what extent?) in order to associate their allies in the triad (which continue to be subordinated).

The alternative in this context is not of great interest to the peoples of the rest of the world. The 'sharing' – of responsibilities and benefits – does not eliminate the barbarous nature of the future it would bring, which remains well and truly apartheid on a worldwide scale.

The project of really existing imperialism does not pave the way to social progress nor to the progress of democracy, nor to the peoples who are the victims (70 per cent of humanity) nor even to the workers of the triad nations, as the implementation of liberal policies over the course of the past 20 years has amply illustrated. It remains that its success – not very likely – would allow 'concessions to be made to consumers' of the triad, if this were necessary. By way of example, let us imagine the petrol shortage. The military control and pillage of productive regions (the Middle East, in the first place) would allow the consumption of this unavoidable source of energy to be reserved exclusively for the countries in the triad, annihilating the possibilities of development for China in particular, and for the South in general.

Despite all of this, does the project stand any chance of pursuing its deployment under the banner of 'authentic economic liberalism'? In the present state of things, one cannot ignore that a significant part of public opinion, particularly in Europe, believes in the possibility of such an alternative. Even more numerous are the ruling milieus of the South, which accept to do battle on its terrain, simply considered 'realistic'. The accession of China to the WTO and the positions taken by developing countries in Cancun (September 2003), which I have analysed elsewhere, testify to this.⁸ History will take it upon itself to dissipate these illusions, but will it be quite soon or too late?

In the face of the reality of the project of capitalism – really existing imperialism, there is but one true alternative: it involves thinking 'beyond capitalism'. And it is then in this long-term perspective that it will be necessary to conceive the stages of the transformation sought, both of national plans and those of the organization of a negotiated globalization. The United Nations recover an important role, in this perspective.

The conflict between the political cultures of the past/present and those of the future/present

The Washington propaganda machine has placed on the agenda a supposed conflict between 'civilizations' (in fact, religions) that has supposedly become inevitable and therefore governs the future. Through the systematic means implemented – promotion of communitarisms under the pretext of respect for differences, an offensive against laicism ('old-fashioned'), praise of religious obscurantisms (placed by postmodernism on an equal level with all other 'ideologies'), systematic promotion of nauseous

ethnocracies (in former Yugoslavia and elsewhere), even cynical manipulations (support by the CIA of terrorist groups mobilized against adversaries in Afghanistan, Chechnya and Algeria, among other places), deceitful warfare declared against supposed 'terrorism' (when such terrorism does not serve Washington's interests) – the United States has managed to put a real face on the conflict. This is an integral part of the barbarous downfall of capitalism and in no way does it constitute an obstacle to the deployment of its project.

The downfall annihilates the fundamental values of universalism and thereby illustrates the senility of the capitalist mode. Because the latter, in previous stages of its development, had been universalist, though this universalism had remained truncated due to the imperialist dimension innate to capitalist globalization. In counterpoint to this political culture of capitalism, whose past is always present (this culture always occupies dominating positions in contemporary societies), the political culture of the alternative (socialism) is likewise universalist and potentially capable of far surpassing the truncated universalism of capitalism. This culture of the future is not only that of a 'theoretical' creative utopia; it is already present in the real conscience of peoples today.

The real ideological/cultural conflict of the 21st century is therefore not the 'shock of civilizations' à la Huntington, but the conflict that opposes the political culture of capitalism, drifting in the direction of barbarity, to that of socialism.

The political culture of capitalism had defined rights and developed a concept of law and democracy that is inherent to it. In order to define its contours, it is useful to subject to analysis the manner of thinking prevailing in United States society, because this culture is present there in a form that is least 'contaminated' by that of its victims and adversaries. At first the only 'rights' recognized were those of individuals (even the acknowledgement of the personality of 'corporations' did not come until much later), in fact 'white' males (and excluding women, who are slaves that can be compared to colonized peoples). Hence, the 'contract' between individuals prevails over law, reducing the legislative role of the State to a marginal one. A banal 'contract' in the United States can contain 200 pages, where elsewhere, in Europe, for instance, where law prevails, two pages would suffice.

These fundamental concepts accompany a political culture based on a rigorous separation of the economic domain of life (managed by private property and the owners' free will, ignoring the social dimensions that are associated with it and, by the same token, devaluing the term 'equality') and that of political life. The latter, cramped, is thus reduced only to the practice of 'representative democracy', that is, the formula of the 'multi-party

system and elections'. It excludes all more advanced forms of democracy, participative by definition.

The concept of 'civil society' in its American definition crowns the edifice. Civil society is thus reduced to a nebulae of 'apolitical', non-government organizations, believed to be – above all if they are based on religious 'communitarian', para-religious, ethnic or neighbourly principles, which they most often are – alongside the private business sector, 'closer to the public' (itself conceived as constituted by consumers more than by citizens) and thus more efficient in managing social goods (education and health in particular). The fact that these procedures increase inequalities does not bother it, as the aspiration to equality is not considered an important ethical value.

Since the French Revolution, the political cultures of France and continental Europe, though they fall perfectly within a capitalist structure, are significantly different.

Here, from the beginning, the values of liberty and equality were placed on an equal footing, which implies social management of their conflict. The State is thus called upon to regulate the deployment of capitalism according to its objectives. This different approach allows for the possibility – if social struggles assert themselves – of embarking upon a participative democracy that, by its very nature, accentuates the conflict through the logic of accumulation of capital, as the 'majority' of citizens can thus oppose the minority of 'owners', only recognized as real active citizens by the excluding logic of capitalism. The approach opens the door to the recognition of positive social rights, ignored by principle in the American model. Because, as you know, these rights entail the active intervention of the legislative and executive branches of the State, as opposed to simply the political and civic liberties that only require the State to abstain from hindering their use. The concept of public administrations assuming the management of collective services (education, health) with a view to ensure the maximum equality takes up a major position in social management. The fact that this formula is in fact more efficient than that implemented in the United States is demonstrated by a comparison of health expenditure (7 per cent of the GDP in Europe versus 14 per cent in the United States) and the associated results (much better in Europe). Under these conditions, a different concept of civil society is possible here; one that lends full importance to popular organizations in defence of social rights (such as trade unions and politicized citizen organizations).

The political culture described here paves the way for going beyond the limits of the logic that capitalist expansion imposes. The socialist future already exists as a potential power in the still-capitalist present.

The conflict between the culture of past/present and that of present/future was begun by the offensive made by Washington to impose on the entire Planet its vision, nonetheless limited and retrograde. An objective that is all the more arrogant, given that the English Common Law comprising its legal infrastructure is a primitive form of law, largely outmoded elsewhere, in Europe and numerous countries of the South. This does not mean that the objective has not been declared: the law of the United States should be accepted as a substitute for international law. Moscow's ambition of imposing a reduced vision of socialism in imitation of the Soviet model is largely outmoded here.

In order to measure the reversals registered in this contemporary battle, it suffices to examine the terms of today's dominating language in politics and the media. Terms that have disappeared: State, policy, power, classes and class struggle, social change, alternatives and revolutions, ideologies. They have been replaced by the insipid terms of governance, communities, social partners, poverty, consensus and changeover.

The attempts of member countries of the OECD to impose a 'universal' business law code that would prevail not only over specific national laws in this domain but also over all other local laws, whether social or political (the so-called AMI project), is part of this offensive. It resembles an attempt to impose the option of 'sharing', reserved for the partners of the imperialist triad. Therefore, it does not constitute a real obstacle to the aggressive deployment of the project by Washington.

The rallying of all of the triad partners behind this retrograde view of law and democracy is not at all mysterious. It can be explained by the desire common to all segments of the dominating imperialist capital of opening new spaces for the increase of profits. Calculated in the short term, true, but with a lack of social resistance capable of making it adjust to its demands, capital never reasons otherwise.

In view of this regression of democracy, the United Nations no longer has specific functions to fulfil. The UN thus loses its essential role, which is, on the one hand, to support democratization by integrating social rights to the set of rights of individuals and peoples, and, on the other hand, to promote an authentic international law system that would be a product of negotiation and commitment to the stages indispensable for the progress of humanity.

The conflict between the 'market' (brutal national and globalized capital) and society (in its local and globalized dimensions) finds its full expression here.

The 'market' (capitalism)/society conflict

The capitalist system in which we live has entered a stage of profound, real transformations whose impact cannot be ignored in the long term and whose foundation is formed by the scientific and technological revolution. In the analysis that I have proposed of these transformations, I emphasized the qualitative novelty of this revolution in comparison to preceding ones, and have reached the conclusion that the implementation of the creative potential of this revolution demands going beyond the social relations innate to capitalism (that is, the domination of capital and its privative appropriation) and the construction of a 'cognitive economy', to use the terms put forth by Carlo Vercellone.⁹ My analysis, like that of Vercellone, calls attention to the obsolete nature of this aspect of capitalism.¹⁰

Yet capitalism is still in effect. It is thus employed to 'direct' this revolution, to subject it to the demands of its reproduction. Conventional economic analyses of the 'economy of growth' (as opposed to the cognitive economy) fall within this strategic framework, which 'postmodernist' discourses attempt to legitimate.

This new contradiction – between the potentially liberating impact of the development of productive capacities and the maintenance through all means of the relations of capitalist social domination – lends the conflict between the logic of capitalist expansion and the affirmation of social interests an unprecedented scope. The strategies employed by the dominant capital reveal themselves, under these conditions, to have a gigantic destructive (barbarous) scope, both in their local effects (in 'national' plans) and in their globalized dimensions.

The system of dominating powers is thus employed in order to flee discussion, substituting it with false debates. The emphasis is then placed on phenomena of the economic situation produced by the capitalist management of the crisis ('financing' constitutes a good example), which are presented as 'irreversible' structural transformations. But above all, the intention is to limit the debate within the biased alternatives of either 'market' or 'State'; the option in favour of the 'State' is rejected (and along with it, the nation), which is qualified simultaneously as 'old-fashioned' (globalization abolishes nations!) and powerless (the failure of socialism has demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the State), leaving nothing except for the option of full submission to the so-called market demands; in fact, those of the dominating oligopolistic capital of the imperialist triad.

This is an ideological discourse devoid of scientific value. Capitalism has never been reducible, and never will be, to a single 'economic' dimension. It does not exist without a political organization of power – the State. In its

global dimension, really existing capitalism has always been synonymous with ‘markets plus canons’. The globalization that it attempts to manage to its exclusive benefit would thus in principle demand the organization of a legitimate globalized political power. Yet the conditions that would allow the construction of such a State (benefiting all the more so from a democratic legitimacy!) do not exist. It is precisely because nations exist. This means that there is, beyond the interests of the capital segments dominating the imperialist oligopolies, what can be called ‘national interests’, whose precise content is defined by historical social commitments of each nation, capable of ensuring the stability of their social and political reproduction (whether within or outside of more or less democratic practices). Especially since, as products of the history of capitalist deployment, unequal by nature, these nations are far from enjoying comparable economic and political power.

The real alternative choice is thus: accepting that socialization on all levels, from national to global, be operated by the sole virtues of the ‘market’; or on the contrary, building (on the long term and by stages) the necessary forms of socialization through democracy (in the richest and fullest sense of the term). Because peoples aspire simultaneously to social progress, the democratization of the management of their lives and respect for their national identities. And capitalism is less and less capable of allowing the effective fulfilment of these aspirations, on both the national and global levels.

The capitalist management of this crisis thus quite clearly requires the intervention of a political force capable of imposing its barbarous demands. For want of an impossible global State, the US State will take charge of this responsibility, as it intends and feels that it can. Europe itself, as it does not constitute ‘one nation – one State’, but only a series of associated nations and States, does not have the means with which to contest the US leadership of the imperialist triad. ‘Sharing’ would go no further than substituting NATO (under the direction of Washington) for the United States army; and this does not change things greatly for the rest of the world. In putting this management into practice, the United States (or, if necessary, the triad accepting its leadership) are called to act outside of all reference to law, international, among other types, and conduct themselves as ‘ruffian States’.

The ‘globalized liberalism’ by which the management of the crisis is designated has no future. Either the societies of the entire Planet accept their submission to the so-called market demands (the future would then bring a world certainly different to that which we have known to date, something worse, infinitely more barbarous, and in this perspective, the UN would no longer make sense); or – and this seems to me not only desirable, but also

more probable – they will eventually impose, through a long transition, the construction of local social systems and a global system progressively integrating the submission of the ‘market’ (and more amply, of the economy, beyond the market – this particular form of managing it) to the demands of socialization through democracy. The UN would have an important role to play in this perspective.

When I say that these are the only two alternatives, I understand that the idea of a ‘third option’, defined in terms of a market management on local and global scales that would be ‘liberal’ (possibly even tinged with social correctives), is perfectly illusory. The dominating capital cannot allow this.

The illusion that it is not only possible and is viable, but that it would even give chances to individuals and peoples who knew how to play the game intelligently, is nevertheless still very strong. The opinion in Europe, bogged down in the quicksand of its project, seems to believe in this. The Chinese ruling class also believes in it. The former and the latter at times even wage combat – though yet hesitant – along these lines. Giovanni Arrighi¹¹ and André Gunder Frank,¹² in their recent writings, imagine that China will be able to rise, in this framework, to the summit of world hierarchy. I do not believe this. Through the implementation of the ‘five monopolies’ by which the imperialist triad profits (and the form of law of the globalized value that expresses its efficiency), really existing capitalism prohibits this type of ‘recouping’. In agreement with Lin Chun,¹³ I suggest that China cannot ‘develop’ (in the sense of emerging from its peripheral state within globalized capitalism) unless it distances itself from the strategies it is implementing at present.

Putting the alternative, ‘socialization through democratization’, into practice entails meeting urgent demands in order to derail the project underway and especially that of the military control of the Planet by the United States and/or NATO. Then it would entail undertaking the reconstruction of a ‘Southern Front’, which cannot be a remake of Bandung in the 1955–1975 period, the reconstruction of the European project, stuck at its foundation, such that it would allow the progress of socialization through democracy, and the invention in China of an authentic ‘market socialism’ constituting the first stage of a long transition to socialism itself. This project implies, on national levels, that the social struggles of the victims of the system, through their politicized and constructed convergence, manage to reconstruct the unity of the workers’ front, without omitting the farmers (half of humanity). On these issues, I refer to developments that I have proposed elsewhere.¹⁴

It is within this framework and in this perspective that one should identify the functions that the UN should fulfil in order to manage the proposed

alternative ‘globalization’ in coherence with the requisites of socialization through democracy. One could then concretely envisage proposals of stages allowing the desired path to be embarked upon.

Proposals for the rebirth of the UN

The proposals that follow are grouped into four ensembles corresponding to the functions for which it would be desirable that the UN assumed important responsibilities.

Proposals concerning the political functions of the UN

- Restoring the UN the major responsibility corresponding to it: ensuring the security of peoples (and States), guaranteeing peace, prohibiting aggression under any pretext whatsoever (such as that invoked in the case of the war in Iraq – which incidentally proved to be a lie). This principle should be emphatically proclaimed once again.

In this spirit, it is necessary to condemn without ambiguity the declarations of the United States government, NATO and the G7, by which the powers concerned adjudicated themselves ‘responsibilities’ that are not theirs.

This condemnation should be complemented by the drafting of political plans to resolve issues relative to the future of countries that are the victims of illegitimate interventions by imperialist powers (former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq). These plans should explicitly establish the withdrawal of foreign military forces. It would by no means be acceptable that the UN be reintroduced ‘by the gang’ to legitimize the conditions created by the condemned interventions. The UN should be invited only to ‘facilitate’ the withdrawal of the invaders.

- Restoring this major function to the UN could obviously imply certain reforms of its institutional architecture.

But one must be wary here. Certain ‘criticism’ has been made and hasty proposals deduced from there, that are not in keeping with the perspective of reinforcing the role of the UN but rather in line with its domestication by the imperialist triad.

Other criticism, apparently ‘democratic and realistic’, could be considered just as bad. I am particularly referring here to the attacks directed against the right to veto: one can easily imagine that if France had not been one of the beneficiaries, the United States would have managed to ‘legitimize’ its aggression. Possible reforms of the Security Council (its enlargement to include India and Brazil, ensuring a stronger representation of the diverse regions of the world) should be the object

of in-depth examination before being put forth. Lending more importance to the General Assembly and improved articulation of resolutions (having or not the force of law according to the hypotheses, to be defined) on the measures required of the Security Council could constitute the axis of this reflection.

- Reinstating this central function of the UN does not imply the return to asserting the 'absolute' sovereignty of States, considered the only representatives of their peoples. In the following section, I will discuss proposals aimed at substituting the sovereignty of peoples with that of the States only, in the perspective of democratization of societies.
- Restoring the UN's functions should allow effective progress in the path of a solution for the major crises characteristic of our era and largely produced (or facilitated) by the strategies of 'generalization of chaos' put into practice by certain powers, first and foremost the United States.

In this spirit, the following should be imposed:

- The establishment of a UN interposition force between Israel (with its 'borders' as per the green line previous to 1967) and Palestine. Israel would not be able to withstand severe economic sanctions such as have been imposed on others.
- The establishment of UN peacekeeping forces in the regions of former occupied Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Kosovo), as well as in African countries that are the victims of so-called 'civil' wars.

These operations could possibly be conceived in close collaboration with the regional organizations concerned (the European Union, Europe in the wider sense, the African Union).

- The UN should actively participate in drafting a 'plan for general disarmament'. This plan would not be able to be reduced to the implementation of the 'Non-Proliferation Treaty', which, in its current form, reinforces the monopoly of the production of weapons of mass destruction to the benefit of those who have proven to be their most frequent users! Disarmament should begin by that of the Powers and be controlled by the UN, which would substitute the 'bipolar' control formerly practised by the two superpowers but now non-existent.

General disarmament should establish the evacuation of all military bases established beyond national borders, and therefore especially those through which the US intends to pursue the implementation of its 'military control of the Planet'.

- The UN should actively participate in the definition of the framework of possible ‘humanitarian interventions’ and their operational modes.

The need for such interventions is not disputable, given that, unfortunately, in the current state of development of societies, occasions of plunging into savagery (ethnocide, ‘ethnic’ or ‘religious’ cleansing, apartheid) are possible. But these interventions cannot be left to the Imperialist Powers, thereby facilitating manipulation, the use of double standards, etc.

- By the same token, the UN should be invested with the main collective responsibility in defining what constitutes ‘terrorist’ actions. The organization should likewise determine the conditions of measures designed to eradicate these practices and should oversee the modes of putting these measures into practice. It would not be possible to entrust the waging of a ‘war against terrorism’ to Powers, and in particular to the United States.

Proposals concerning the rights of peoples and the creation of international law

- The principle guiding these proposals are based on the observation made above that the concept of sovereignty of States should be redefined.

That the general public opinion today considers that all human beings are responsible for what occurs, not only within the borders of the States of which they are citizens, but all over the world, constitutes – in my opinion – an indication of progress of universal awareness. This progress brings back the issue of the old concept (from the Treaty of Westphalia to the Charter of the United Nations) of the absolute and exclusive sovereignty of States.

The contradiction between said sovereignty and the rights of peoples is real. Yet this contradiction cannot be eliminated by the abolition of one of its terms: that of the right of peoples (by maintaining the old concept of sovereignty) or that of sovereignty (which would in fact be to the benefit of interventions and manipulations by imperialist powers).

This contradiction can only be overcome by the real progress of democratization of all societies. This consists of a process which, it must be admitted, must simply be allowed to follow its pace, that of the progress of the affirmation of the need for democracy. The international organization must intervene here to sustain this progress, accelerate its translation into real change in the exercise of powers. The UN is the place par excellence where this debate should be unflinchingly pursued.

- There are already charters of rights which are beginning to show signs of progress in the expansion of their definitions. To the first charters, limited to political and civic rights understood in a restricted sense, were added the Charters of Collective and Social Rights. These efforts must be unflinchingly pursued, the Charters being far from sufficient in the present state. The right of peoples to development, for example, which was the object of in-depth reflection in ‘private’ circles (the Lelio Basso International Foundation for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, for instance) or groupings partially under state control (the Non-Aligned Movement, for instance), should be declared an integral part of the universal rights of individuals and peoples. The right of all farmers on the Planet (half of the human population) to have access to land and to human and viable conditions for its use, which is an integral part of the right to development, has not, to date, even begun to show signs of being recognized.

It is likewise within this universal framework – as represented by the United Nations – that the efforts should be pursued to establish rights whose recognition is only in its infancy, or at least far from being attained to date. The rights asserting in principle and establishing in practice the equality of men and women belong to this family of rights. Those concerning ‘collective’ rights through which ‘identities’ are expressed – cultural, linguistic and religious identities, among others – should likewise be the object of in-depth debate allowing their definition and that of their fields of application. In no case should the recognition of these rights to diversity allow the demand for the ‘communitarian organization’ of societies (by the same token denying the ‘right to resemblance’ and the rights of the individual outside of the community). In other words, the rights in question would be unable to question the principle of laicism.

Many ‘realists’ lend but little importance to charters of rights that are only valid to the degree to which there are measures taken to ensure their effective execution. These people probably underestimate the importance of law, which can become an effective weapon used to enforce these charters. Action can be sustained through the creation of a system of universal tribunals, which we will discuss below:

- The UN should exercise particular responsibility in the creation of an international business law code.

The increase of all sorts of relations in a globalized economy makes the creation of an international business law code more necessary than ever. Nevertheless, this particular law domain would not be allowed to prevail

over the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples nor over their national formulations. The option provided in this sphere by the AMI project is therefore unacceptable.

Moreover, the drafting of this law would not be entrusted to a single partner represented by the set of interests of the dominating capital (the 'Club of Transnationals'), as is the case with WTO projects. Especially considering that the partner in question invests itself as legislator, judge and party, as it is the sole master of its business tribunal project. Rarely have the elementary principles of law and justice been trampled with such impertinence! In its absence, allowing, as is in fact the case, the courts of the United States (whose impartiality is more than doubtful) and the (especially primitive) law codes of that country to dominate the practice with regard to regulating business is no less unacceptable.

International business law should be drawn up through transparent debate involving all interested parties, that is, not only the business world, but also the workers concerned (of the businesses in question as well as of entire nations, who are suffering the consequences of the legislation put into effect) and States. There are no premises other than those of the UN (and the ILO, which is one of its expressions) for conducting this debate.

- The UN cannot be invested from one day to another as a 'World State' nor a 'world government', or even as a supranational authority vested with powers too ample in varied spheres.

Acknowledging this does not rule out that a path be embarked upon that could lead to this in the longer term.

The proposals put forth in this perspective should be the object of our undivided attention, true, but also of our greatest vigilance. Today, there are many proposals being put forth that aim to associate the 'civil society' (defined in the Washington manner as described above) with the life of the organization and some of these proposals attempt to give the representation of the 'business world' a major position in this association! In contrast, the workers' world – the majority of human beings as opposed to the minority of millionaires – is always ignored by the advocates of this 'reform' of the UN. The latter have gone as far as intending to reduce the powers, already insignificant, of the ILO. Unfortunately, the administration of this organization truly seems to be an accomplice of this project for social regression.

Proposals concerning the institution of a 'World Parliament', composed of representatives of national parliaments (which do not always exist and are only seldom truly representative of the people), are not necessarily trivial or unrealistic. An evolution moving in this direction could be undertaken, even if it is clear that the democracy that it supposedly supports

could not advance on a universal scale more quickly than it could on the scale of the nations concerned.

Proposals concerning the economic management of globalization

- So-called ‘deregulated’ globalization, as it is at present, is in fact one form of globalization among many, which is regulated exclusively and wholly by the dominating globalized capital (the ‘transnationals’) and their political debtors (the G7). This form, which is neither ‘inevitable’ nor ‘the only alternative’ nor even acceptable, should be substituted by institutionalized forms of regulation on a world-wide scale, supporting and possibly complementing the regional and national forms of regulation that peoples will eventually impose here and there, even granting that there may be contradictions and conflicts between these different levels of the economic management of the modern world.

The task is thus complicated and the progress that could be made in the short term, even if the UN were mobilized in this field, would long remain modest. But it should allow the beginning of evolution favourable to peoples and their workers and should therefore not be disdained.

- Considering their enormously devastating effects, international debts could constitute a solid starting point for opening a debate on the functions of the UN in managing the world economy.

The prevailing discourse attributes the sole responsibility for debt to the borrowing countries, whose behaviour can supposedly not be justified (corruption, facility or irrationality of the political decision-makers, extremist nationalism, etc.). The reality is quite another thing. A significant percentage of loans were in fact the result of systematic policies implemented by the lenders, seeking to place an excess of capital that – due to the profound economic crisis of the past 20 years – could not be used in productive investment, neither in wealthy countries nor in those deemed able to receive their capital. Artificial alternative uses were thus fabricated to prevent the devaluation of excess capital. The explosion of ‘speculative’ capital movements made on a very short term resulted from these policies, such as their placement in the ‘debt’ of the developing countries and the former Eastern Block countries. The World Bank in particular, but also many large private banks in the United States, Europe and Japan, as well as transnationals, share a major responsibility which is never mentioned. ‘Corruption’ is added to these policies, with the double complicity of the lenders (the World Bank, private banks, transnationals) and the authorities of the States

concerned in the South and East. A systematic audit of these ‘debts’ is called for as a priority. It would demonstrate that a large part of the debts in question are legally illegitimate.

The weight of paying this debt is absolutely unsustainable, not only for the most impoverished countries of the South, but even for those that are not. We should recall here that when, in the aftermath of World War I, Germany was condemned to pay reparations amounting to 7 per cent of its exports, liberal economists of the time concluded that this charge was unsustainable and that the productive machine of that country would be unable to ‘adjust’ to it. Today, economists of the same liberal school do not hesitate to propose the ‘adjustment’ of the economies of the developing countries to the demands of paying debts that are five or at times ten times heavier. Therefore, in reality, collecting the debt is today a form of pillaging the wealth and work of the peoples of the South (and the East). A particularly lucrative form as it has managed to make the poorest countries of the Planet exporters of capital to the North. Also a particularly brutal form that frees dominating capital from worries and from the vicissitudes of managing the businesses and workforces that they implement. The debts are payable, that is all. It is the duty of the States concerned (and not of the capital of the ‘lenders’) to extract it from its people’s labour. The dominating capital is freed of all responsibility and concern.

A ‘classification’ of debts is called for. These can be ranged under one of the three following categories:

Indecent and immoral debts

A good example of these is the loans taken out by the apartheid government of South Africa in its time, loans taken out to purchase weapons in order to put down the revolt of its African peoples.

Dubious debts

These consist of loans taken out largely at the suggestion of the financial powers of the North (including the World Bank) and made possible by processes of corruption whose creditors are the actors involved as well as the debtors. The majority of these loans were not invested in the projects that justified their issuance (and this fact was known to the lenders, who were accomplices). In this case, the debts are purely and simply illegal in the eyes of a justice minimally worthy of the name. In some cases, the loans were indeed invested, but in absurd projects imposed by the lenders (and especially by the World Bank). Here also, it was the Bank’s process that was worth carrying out. But this institution is not financially ‘responsible’, having placed itself above the laws and the discourse of liberalism on ‘risks’!

Acceptable debts

In cases where loans were effectively used to the ends for which they were intended, the acknowledgement of the debt is indisputable.

Not only should indecent and dubious debts be unilaterally repudiated (after an audit), but the payments made in their name should also be reimbursed by the ‘creditors’, after their capitalization at the same interest rates as the debtors had to pay. It would then see that it is the North, in fact, that is deeply indebted to its victims in the South.

The debt management proposed for the ‘Heavily Indebted Poor Countries’ (HIPC) reveals a completely different logic. The entirety of the debt is considered perfectly ‘legitimate’, with no examination or audit whatsoever. The proposal is based on the sole – and unacceptable – principle of ‘charity’. The intention is to ‘alleviate’ the charges for these ‘very poor peoples’, but at the same time, impose upon them draconian supplementary conditions that definitively place them in a category approaching that of ‘colonies administered directly by foreigners’.

But beyond the proposed audit and the adoption of measures that would allow the accounts to be balanced and in order to prevent analogous situations from being reproduced in the future, it remains necessary to draw up an international debt law code, to date in its infancy, and of authentic courts to dictate the law in this sphere (which would allow going well beyond what one can expect of arbitration commissions).

- Reinstating the full responsibility of the United Nations in the organization of the world economic system involves the redefinition of the functions of the major institutions that comprise it (the UNCTAD and ILO, among others) or that are external to it (the WTO, IMF and the World Bank).

The principal priority objectives that could be assigned in this sphere could be as follows:

- The resuscitation of the UNCTAD and the identification of its new (or renewed) functions, such as: (i) drawing up a global framework for a ‘foreign investment code’ allowing the regulation of relocation and the protection of the workers of all the partners concerned; (ii) the negotiation of conditions of access to the markets for the different national and regional partners. These proposals call into question the total marginalization that the UNCTAD has suffered, all of its powers having been transferred to the WTO. This organization should be thoroughly rethought if we wish to have it escape from the orbit in which it is imprisoned, strictly defined by the Club of Transnationals.

- The resuscitation of the ILO, not in the sense proposed by the current administration of this organization, but precisely in the opposite sense, that of reinforcing the representation and rights of workers.
- The renegotiation of the world monetary system, of the institutionalization of regional arrangements guaranteeing the stability of exchange rates, a new IMF (which would have hardly anything to do with the organization by the same name existing today) with the responsibility of managing the interconnection between the regional systems concerned. In the current state of affairs, the IMF, which is not responsible for relations between the dominating currencies (the dollar, euro, yen, pound sterling, Swiss franc), operates as a colonial, collective (for the Triad) monetary authority in charge of managing the finances of dependent countries by subjecting them, on the one hand and through 'structural adjustments', to the demands of the pillaging of their resources to the benefit of floating capital, and on the other hand, to the tributary drain represented by the repayment of debts.
- The construction of a world capital market worthy of this name and designed to orient monetary movement towards productive investment (in both the North and the South) and, as a necessary complement, equipped to discourage so-called 'speculative' financial flows (the Tobin Tax could be considered in this context). This market would call into question the functions of the World Bank (the Ministry of Propaganda of the G7) and of the WTO (the agent executing the will of transnationals).
- In the sphere of the economic management, the UN can certainly do no more than it could in the political management of the world. But it could likewise undertake the construction of a globalized economic government (and policy). And where there is a government, there are finances.

The sphere of managing the natural resources of the world without a doubt constitutes the best entranceway leading to this path.

Access to natural resources is always relevant insofar as the principle of national sovereignty. But this principle has been and often continues to be disdained by events, not only in colonial situations (where national sovereignty disappears), but also through the exercise of power relations that are generally analysed in terms of 'geopolitics', or even 'geostrategy'. This de facto unequal access is the source of immense waste by the societies of the 'North' of the planet's resources, and by the impossibility of foreseeing the extension of the forms of consumption concerned to the totality of peoples, who are thus condemned by the imposed form of globalization to the state of victims of 'apartheid on the global scale'. Ecologic movements, which are the source of the awareness of the dramatic scope of the problem, have not

really managed to make the world system of powers (represented by the Conferences of Rio and Kyoto, which led to the Conference of Johannesburg in August 2002) accept appropriate and efficient forms of democratic global management of access to these resources. The militarization of globalization should likewise be associated to the objectives of the control of the natural resources of the world by hegemonic power.

The exploitation of the resources in question arises in principle from that of 'existing capitalism'. The latter is based on the short-term view of financial profitability and the decision-makers in this domain – the transnationals – know no other perspective. We are fully in a domain where the supposed rationality of management according to the market is in fact irrationality from the viewpoint of the interests of peoples considered in the long term. The discourse on 'sustainable development' proceeds from an awareness of this contradiction between the market and the interests of humanity, but often does not arrive at concrete and practical consequences.

The alternative of a rational ('sustainable') and democratic (in local plans and in those of the global system) management of natural resources could be discussed on the basis of proposals that have always been hinted at, such as that of a world taxation of income associated with excess and exploitation of these resources and the redistribution of the product of said taxation to the benefit of the peoples concerned, designed to favour the development of disadvantaged countries and regions and to discourage waste.

This could be the manner of creating the embryo of globalized taxation.

The issue embraces a great number of resources – minerals, oil, water and climate. I suggest initiating debate in two domains, concerning oil and water, respectively.

- Management by the UN of water, a common asset of all peoples:
There is no life without water, which is just as necessary as air. Among the multiple uses of water, we will focus here only on those concerning agriculture – which consumes the largest amount.

The supply of water is distributed by nature among the different rural societies of the planet in an extremely unequal manner. There are regions of the world that receive water for free from the 'heavens'. In the meantime, in other places – in arid or semi-arid regions – water must be collected from wells or rivers, and distributed via irrigation throughout the entire farmland area. There, water has a production cost that is far from insignificant. Should one respond to this situation of dearth by putting a price on this resource in these cases?

By accepting to strictly follow the reasoning of conventional economy and of commercial alienation that constitutes its pedestal, by accepting to play the game of competitiveness within the framework of unbridled globalization, one cannot but either accept a systematically lower remuneration of the work of some, or simply stop producing. Liberal globalization condemns agriculture in vast regions of the planet to extinction.

But peoples, nations and States exist. They occupy spaces on the surface of the planet that are theirs and that do not enjoy identical natural conditions. A realist political economy should take this into account. The conventional economy, feigning ignorance of these dimensions of reality, substitutes them with the theory of an imaginary globalized world, defined at once by the merchandising of all aspects of social life and all conditions relating to human activity, and by its extension to the planetary level. This theory allows it to legitimize the unilateral ambitions of capital without being concerned about social reality. If the liberals, who defend this fundamentalism of capital, were coherent with their own logic, they would arrive at the conclusion that the optimal use of natural resources (in this case, water) requires a massive redistribution of peoples of the world due to the unequal distribution of this resource on the surface of the Planet. In this case, water would become the public property of all of humanity.

In the meantime, water is one of the public goods particular to a given peoples or country. If, for these peoples, this good is relatively rare, access to it must be rationalized. The cost of access to its use should be distributed among all inhabitants in one way or another, that is, through the regulation of the market by means of an acceptable system of subsidies and taxation. The formula for this system would be the result of a series of compromises defined by internal social conditions and those governing the way in which the country is integrated in the world economy. Compromises between the farmers and the consumers of foodstuffs; compromises between the demands of a development defined in terms of a project of society and the possible need for exportation that the implementation of this project could require at a given stage of its deployment (in this spirit, one could 'naturally' conceive of subsidizing non-competitive exports). This formula cannot be defined in absolute terms once and for all; it remains relative and historically dated.

The response to these problems lies in the sphere of what should be called 'the right of peoples and humanity'. This right is, with regard to water, nearly inexistent since each country is, in principle, free to use the underground and surface waters within its borders as it sees fit. Agreements governing water management, should they exist, are but the product of private international treaties. The need to advance in this domain towards a real right of peoples and of humanity has already become urgent. The international business law that the interests of capital have imposed, and which

currently constitutes the exclusive concern of international institutions created to this effect (the WTO in particular), is not a possible substitute for the absence of a right of peoples to manage this public property of humanity. On the contrary, it is quite the opposite.

Proposals concerning the institutionalization of an international justice system

- There are already a series of international courts of justice, some of which were established even before the creation of the UN; others are the recent product of the denunciation of war crimes and of crimes against humanity.

The archipelago comprised by these international institutions of justice nonetheless remains of quite limited effectiveness, both because of the restrictive definition of their competencies and due to the refusal by certain powers (the United States in the first place) to acknowledge their legitimacy.

A preliminary task is called for: make a thorough inventory of the institutions, propose critical analyses of the shortcomings of the institutions concerned, and identify the areas of legal void which should be gradually filled.

Furthermore, there are so-called ‘opinion tribunals’, which have no legal status, yet fulfil functions of great utility in alerting public opinion (the Bertrand Russell International War Crimes Tribunal constitutes a good example). The missions accomplished by these institutions deserve to be pursued, their actions supported and their echo amplified. Nevertheless, this should not constitute an obstacle to conducting campaigns in order to create recognized international tribunals in charge of sentencing law. Obviously, at the same time, by pursuing the action of encoding the rights that the tribunals concerned will be entrusted with enforcing.

As an indispensable complement to the proposals put forth in the preceding paragraphs concerning the responsibilities of the UN, a series of international courts of justice should be conceived and proposed in order to aid implementation. The proposals whose objective is to reinforce the juridical dimensions of action taken by the United Nations concern three sets of courts of justice whose establishment would seem desirable.

- The first group of juridical institutions to be considered concerns the political aspects of managing globalization.

If the actions and interventions of States beyond their boundaries, whatever their pretexts, are to be subject to the judgement of the United Nations, it is

advisable that a relevant court of law of this organization have a word to legitimize or condemn these interventions. The International Court of Justice in The Hague can hardly do this under the present conditions of definitions of its competencies. The revision of the competencies of this Court in order to expand its powers is called for. One could imagine that the victim State, like the General Assembly of the UN, could have recourse to the Court, even in the hypothetical case of opposition by the State who was the author of the intervention being questioned.

Otherwise, the imperialist powers (the United States first and foremost) will never be able to be judged for their violations of international law, even if these violations are undisputable.

Some progress has nevertheless been made after actions and interventions by States, thanks to the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity; some ad hoc international criminal tribunals have been established in this spirit (for the crimes committed in Yugoslavia and in Rwanda) and an agreement was made allowing the establishment of a general criminal court. This progress remains insufficient, as the refusal of certain powers to undersign the agreement renders their accusation in this tribunal impossible. The crimes committed by the United States are hence beyond the reach of any ruling other than one of 'opinion'. This is absolutely unacceptable and considerably reduces the legitimacy of rulings made against other possible criminal States. It is high time that the Ruffian State par excellence – the United States – be forced to confront the judges. All cases should be able to be submitted to the Court (simply at the request of the victim State, among others) and the criminals judged in absentia, if necessary.

- A second group of juridical institutions deserves to be established in order to consolidate the rights of individuals and peoples recognized by the United Nations.

One could take inspiration from the European Court of Justice, to which, within the domains of its competence, the victims – whether individuals or collectives – can submit their cases directly – without necessarily gaining the previous authorization from the State from which they come. Yet one could – and even should – expand the domains of competence of international justice (to include, among other things, social rights), and to this effect, Chambers other than the Court of Human and Peoples' Rights of the UN could be established.

- A third group of juridical institutions to be established concerns business law.

One could imagine diverse Chambers in the Court of Trade Law of the UN, with specified competencies, one of which would be called criminal chamber and would judge criminal economic acts. The case of Bhopal illustrates the scandalous impunity that transnationals are currently enjoying.

It is likewise in this context that a Chamber of the Court could be established to handle cases of litigation concerning foreign debt.

Action plan for implementation of proposals

The proposals put forth here are certainly ambitious and the execution of only part of them will require time. But the future starts now and there is no reason for postponing the launching of an action plan to ensure progress.

I do not believe it useful to appeal to governments to negotiate as of today the 'UN reform'. They will do it themselves if they deem it necessary. But the power relations that prevail today are such that there is little chance that these reforms – if they were pursued – would go in the right direction. On the contrary, there is every reason to fear that they would be in line with the dominant imperialist strategies of the time, which aim to marginalize and domesticate the international organization even more. One can expect to have to rather make a campaign against the reforms proposed in this spirit rather than supporting them!

I thus believe that another approach must be taken, by first addressing public opinion. In this spirit, I propose the establishment of ad hoc International Commissions (on each topic of the project concerned). These commissions could then supply analyses and proposals to the vast nebula of movements recognizable in the Social, National, Regional and Global Forums. The World Forum of Alternatives, through the channel of its centres for critical reflection constituted by its network of correspondents and members, could help to coordinate the enterprise.

Once the commissions' works were sufficiently advanced, they could – and should – become the object of vast campaigns of global scope based on objectives defined precisely by each of them. One would thus contribute to correcting the imbalances that characterize the power relations prevailing in the contemporary world.