

Interview with Professor Amin

My first question may sound like a joke, but it's not; I am serious. It's Dec. 13th, 2012 today. According to the Mayan Prophecy, we only have about one week left before the end of the world. If it was true, what would you like to say to the world now?

Aha, I don't know. But if I have to say something I would like to say it is a pity that the world will come to an end. Because we just begin a process of transition to Communism and I think Communist is a higher level of civilization.

What you said sounds very different from what we are usually told. Why is that?

Many people say it's capitalism in crisis, but capitalism has been in crisis before and it always overcame its crisis and continue its expansion after changes made by the crisis. It's just a crisis, nothing more. But I think it's wrong because this crisis is of nature different from the previous crisis of capitalism. It's not just a financial crisis or a crisis of overproduction or a crisis of this or that. It is a crisis of civilization and capitalist civilization will come to an end. I consider capitalism as a short period which has been characterized by the fact that it has prepared for the conditions for going beyond capitalism, to socialism, a higher stage of human civilization.

You used to say, capitalism is about managing crises, it could not solve the crises. For sure the world is full of crises now, what do you make of the new features of the stage of capitalist crisis since 2008?

This crisis is what I call the autumn of capitalism. But why? I have to give proofs. We have reached the point where the centralization of the control capital has moved way high as compared to what it was only 40 years ago. In the short period between 1975 and 1990, there has been a tremendous change, qualitative change, in monopoly capital. Monopoly capital is nothing new, it started from the end of 19th century ~~century~~ as Hobson, Lenin analyzed it. We have move to a new stage of financial capital with a much higher level of control of capital, not of property. Property can be disseminated. For example, pension funds. The formal owners of pension funds are millions and millions of workers, but that is not important. What important is the pension funds are actually managed by financial capital.

At this very high level of centralization of capital, there is a new phenomenon, which is financialization. Financialization is the fact that the non-productive activities, the centralized control of capital, have introduced a new internal contradiction into capitalism, a contradiction between the conditions for the reproduction of financialized capitalism on the one hand and the conditions for the reproduction of the process of accumulation of capital on the other hand. Financialization is moving up, while the capital accumulation is moving very slowly down. This cannot go forever.

In the central imperialist triad, US, Europe and Japan, there is a difference between no growth and high financialization. This is a system which is not sustainable, politically, socially and ecologically, because it is a system which is creating growing inequalities while the basis for accumulation is relatively stagnant. It is a new contradiction between the conditions of financialization and growth, not the classic and basic contradiction of capitalism between labor and capital. That is making the system unsustainable, and therefore it is imploding. It's not a crisis; it's an implosion, the breakdown of the system, which will be long and can take many decades, not in a week or three months. An example of it is the implosion of Euro system and European system as part of that of the global financial system.

This implosion is what I call the autumn of capitalism. There is no coincidence of the autumn of capitalism on the one hand and people's spring on the other hand. Because people's spring implies that people have positive alternatives. There are movements, perfectly legitimate, of resistance and struggles. Yet it's not the struggle of the people which is the reason for the crisis, but the internal contradiction of the system.

This time slot between the autumn of capitalism and the spring of people is very dangerous. The breakdown of the system is creating not alternatives but chaos and wars, because the system tries to maintain itself by all means including by pure violence. That is what Gramsci said, if the night is not yet finished and the day not yet begin, in the gray monsters appear. We are in such a period. Between the autumn of capitalism and the spring of people there is a ~~window of time for~~ chaos.

This is why I think this crisis is not like other ones, not even like 1929. It's a crisis of another nature which is the signal that capitalism has come to the end of its capacity of being productive and being inventive. It is now a system exclusively destructive.

Is it fair to say that capitalism has run out of its energy of managing crises?

Yes. You can see it from European example, every three months they say the crisis is ~~a few weeks from~~ over and yet it goes on worse.

By the way, you anticipate a poly-centric world. Do you see the now falling-apart European integration used to be part of the process to such a world? Many people think so.

No. I never considered European integration as building a bloc which would be autonomous from the US, but building a bloc of collective imperialism led by the US and within the financialized globalization. Therefore, the implosion of the global system expresses itself, among other things, by the implosion of the European system.

In Latin America, there are illusions. People there see their main enemy is the US; and many people think Europe is less bad and they maybe have the support of Europe vis-à-vis the US. They are wrong. You would be also wrong if you disassociate Japan from the US. Japan is subordinate to the US. Many Chinese people would think

Japan is bad, but the US is good after all the US was with us in the last war against Japan. However, you can see from the provocation of the islands in the East China Sea, it is not Japan, it is the US behind.

Then what would a poly-centric world be like? Do you use the word center here in a geographical meaning?

Poly-centric means creating a room for the partners, first where the rules of managing the whole things are negotiated. They are not the same rules for everybody. The World Bank, the IMF says the same rules should be implemented to all; and this is not acceptable. At this point, Chinese are right when they say we should respect the sovereignty of people, including choices of their own social system.

Many critical thinkers, including you, believe the world is facing a great bifurcation, either to socialism or to an even more barbarous situation. I believe it is why you say we are in a dangerous time now. If the world happens to take the wrong direction, what do you picture the barbarity, what it would be like?

The barbarity will firstly be war, and it is war basically against China. In the time of Clinton government, not Bush, there was a report of CIA, the Pentagon Papers, where the establishment of the US was studying the possibility of an preemptive war against China with nuclear attack, annihilating 600 millions of Chinese, which means half of the population of China. That is one of the agenda, one of the worst possibilities and we should consider it very clearly.

The imperialist triad, US, Europe and Japan, want to keep the exclusive access for them to the resources of the whole planet. This is the reason for the military occupation of the Middle East, for the war against Iraq, etc. Now China as an emerging country also needs to have access to much of the resources of the planet. They may not allow it. The last resort for not allowing China, and other countries of course, to the access of resources is war.

But I'm afraid that many people especially the new middle class will refuse to believe it and blame you for saying that. They tend to think American values are good, the country is nice and if we keep going on this way, China will someday become another US.

This is illusion. Firstly I refer to the Pentagon Papers, it was published by a famous American journalist ~~Denia~~ Daniel Ellsberg, and he's very well-known. This is very important; it should be known and published in China. And in 1991 when the US started the war against Iraq, a geo-politician of Egypt, whose name is Hassanein Heykal and is not left at all, wrote an article and said the war against China has started. He said that the war against Iraq is not only to destroy Iraq and to control the oil of Iraq, also to establish a strong military base covering the whole Middle East as a

menace basically to China and eventually also to Russia and India. That also should be known.

Why the illusion in China? After the breakdown of Soviet Union in 1991, the new system of financialized monopoly capital was established and it looked brilliant. It was the time when silly things as “the end of history” was written, and other things like “socialism has finished forever” and “capitalism is going to produce peace, democracy and progress for all” etc. There was a period in the 1990s in which China jumped into globalization with a growth of exports and a higher rate of GDP very easily. That helped the process of modernization of China, because there was no problem with importing the ingredients to accelerate the growth.

That created illusions that this could be sustainable for long. It is obvious that this is not going to continue and I think the Chinese leadership has understood that you should turn to internal market. That also created deep depoliticization because the process of modernization has been captured by a new fast growing middle class that understand it could be going and going. It hides the fact that this is going into conflict with the imperialist centre, the US, and its subordinate allies Europe and Japan.

Are there any other scenarios of the possible future barbarity?

I don't have a crystal ball, and I cannot read into the future. But I see also one of the dimensions of barbarous solution is lumpen development for most of the countries of the South. This is a process of going to pauperization and extermination. For imperialism Africa is important because of the resources, but the Africans are of no importance. They are a burden. Therefore, the strategy as part of the barbarous solution will be apartheid on the global scale into exterminating people, like the beginning of capitalism. Capitalism has started with an extermination of the Indians in America, we should never forget that.

Another dimension of barbarism is destruction of the condition of safe and ecological reproduction of life on earth, and using energy for production of waste That brings changes in climate and tremendous disasters.

You expect global socialism, a more egalitarian world which I believe many people would love to live in. But how could such a world be possible? We can't just say it will come into being because it is morally desirable. Do the people have enough power to prevent the bad things happen and turn it to global socialism?

I will say yes because of 1) China, 2) the other people in the South and 3) the people in the North.

China now has moved into globalization but it has not done two things which are the ingredients for being full member of globalized capitalist system. First, it has not moved into financial globalization, it has maintained a sovereign system of managing the financial side of its economic life. It is running the Yuan by itself, the system of banks are state banks and they are out of global financialization. Until now there are strong pressures that China should join the global financialization. I am saying No,

you should not, because the financial globalization is itself imploding and in decline. Why should you join a system which is in decline? If you keep your independence, you will be in a good position vis-à-vis the decline. If you move in, you will drown and go down with the others. The US's proposal to China is G2. It is flattery to China: you are the big country after the US, the others don't count, let manage the world together. That is a trap. It is inviting China to join the US against all the other people and decline with the US.

The second positive point which makes China able to resist the implosion is that until now China has maintained the system where the land is not commodified. Land is the property of the collective of villages. The way and means to manage this land property may be ~~disguised~~ various and changing ; there are different means, more or less efficient, more or less socially fair. We can discuss all of that. But the principle should be maintained. There is also enormous pressure to privatize the property of land. That would be a disaster. Let's compare China and Brazil. Brazil has only 11% of its total population which is still rural ~~of the world~~. Because the privatized property of land has accelerated the exodus of rural population, The result is that 50% of the urban area is slums which are in terrible pauperization. It is not the case of China. Because of the non-private property of rural agricultural land, China has been able to a certain extent to control the migration from rural to urban. Therefore, you don't have slums; you have inequality, but not inequality with pauperization.

There are the two reasons for which China is now at a crossroad, either to make mistake of moving more into the globalization at the very moment the globalization is in crisis or to maintain relatively out of it.

Secondly, the other countries of the South. In those countries we can already see that the process of capitalist expansion is the process of pauperization. It's socially not acceptable and there are explosions, potentially revolutionary, in Latin America and elsewhere. It means that people not only resist, but also begin thinking this system doesn't meet our demands.

Even in the centers, you can see with the implosion of the European system the movements, for example the indignant people in Spain. And the Occupy the Wall Street movement in the US.

What is needed strongly here? Internationalism of working class and peoples.

In China there is huge pressure on the leadership to take what you described the wrong direction. And as of the struggles of the people, I sort of doubt the effect. The movement of the occupation of the Wall Street, for instance, did attract a lot media attention, but it did not change the American political landscape.

Yes, your observations are correct. In the short run, the struggles of the people in the South and in the North are not yet at the level of compelling the system to change. The initiative continues to be in the hands of the ruling class that is of generalized financialized monopoly capital. The Occupy Wall Street movement has not prevented the electoral battle between the same two men of the establishment of the US because the Democrats and the Republicans are the same establishment which is

completely controlled by monopoly capital. In Egypt the revolution, which is not a revolution but a gigantic ~~surprising~~ uprising, has not changed the system because the Muslim Brotherhood continued the old system of capitalist submission to globalized capitalism. But you can read in Cairo very beautiful slogans written on the walls. The revolution has not changed the system, but it has changed the people. It means the struggles will continue and you will see it, whatever be the result of the so-called referendum.

We should look into longer view. Politics is not about operating within defined balances ~~balancing~~ of power as they are today; it is changing the balance of powers. Politics is not just short run, you need longer strategy. In short run China could say, oh, capitalist crisis is bad for us because we export less, we should help capitalism solve its problem. You must know this crisis is going to continue to deepen; therefore the short run attitude is wrong. Instead of moving more into the globalization, you should control more the position vis-à-vis the globalization. It is the same for the other people. In Egypt now, there are various components of the movements, i.e. radicalized new generation of youth, trade unions, the Democratic Party of the middle class, the Communist Party, movements of small peasants resisting to its accelerating pauperization, and so on. All these components are gradually coming together, ~~not have come together~~, with a common strategy vis-à-vis the current system. This is a historical process.

Those in power won't let their power go easily. They will fight to retain it and they got the edge of controlling all the means, the most important of which is military. How could the people defeat them?

This is too simplified. In history there have been revolutions and changes. You could say the Qing had power in its hand, and yet there was revolution in 1911; you can say that Guomindang had power in its hand, and yet the Communists won; and the Tsar had power, but there was the Russian Revolution. Again the example of Egypt, when the demonstration first started, there were two or three millions of people, the police used guns and at least three thousands of people were killed. But they continued, and at certain point of time there were fifteen millions. It changed the balance of force, and the police was defeated and retreated. Now the credibility of Morsi has gone down very fast, people say Morsi and Mubarak are the same.

It is not that you have power in hand and you cannot lose it. The social legitimacy of power is very important. When the power system loses its legitimacy and its credibility, it begins to weaken, including the arms forces within it.

Mao Zedong said that the dust won't go away automatically if the broom doesn't reach it. The critical question is where the broom is. It should be a proper global revolution which can break the endless process of capital accumulation. But the global revolution is unimaginable in such a post-revolutionary era.

Yes and no. There has never been and will never be a global revolution, all the people

of the planet moving together to change the system. That will never happen. What will happen is what has happened in the past, unequal advances, some people advancing more than others.

I don't like to use the word Revolution with capital r, because people will think the Revolution is going to solve all the problems forever. I prefer revolutionary advances which means changes in balance of forces to the benefit of the popular forces will prepare another advance later. It is possible; at least it is needed, if we want to avoid the worse.

Can I understand you in this way: with the example of Egypt, despite the fact that the people sacrificed life and others and the old political forces took the advantages, but anyway the Muslim Brotherhood administration is better than that of Mubarak?

The new regime of Muslim Brotherhood would be no different from the old one, it will do nothing good. But this regime has lost its credibility very fast, faster than I expected. I thought people would have illusion and take time to discover that it's not different. No, they have understood it in a few months. It means the people will continue. The revolution has not changed the regime but it has changed the people. The people said, last time we had three thousands of people kill and next time we will have six thousands of people killed, but we shall win.

I agree with that the people have changed, but if the system of endless capital accumulation not, then I don't see any substantial changes.

The system, in the case of Egypt, is a system of submission to globalization, which lead to the process of massive pauperization, with all the social disasters, survival activities instead of productive activities. There is also another side of the system, the political management, which is more and more violent.

The alternative has coming. I was in Egypt in the two last months before coming to China; and I wrote to discuss all the components of the movements, the youth, the workers, the Communist Party, etc. I discover that they now have immediate programs. It is not socialism; it is minimum wage, better taxation and so on, very feasible programs. These are revolutionary advances. It would not be moving out of capitalism at all, but already be starting moving out of globalization. This is a big step ahead.

So you mean step by step, the people will get more. You sound very optimistic.

Yes, I am optimistic because I see the people are gradually aware of the complexity of the nature and the difficulties of the challenge.

The Chinese leadership has declared repeatedly that China has no intention for world hegemony. What do you think of that? Do you think China should stand up to challenge the US's uni-polar world order?

I think when Chinese leadership since Mao said China has no target of becoming an imperialist hegemony power they are sincere, not only for moral reasons but also being realistic. China has not the military power to become imperialist power. It is good but not enough, because China has the responsibility in contributing to the building of internationalism of working people, particularly South-South common front vis-à-vis imperialism.

How did 20th century start? By revolution of 1905 in semi-periphery Russia which announced 1917; by revolution of 1911 in periphery China which announced the long revolutionary series leading to 1949; and 1910 in Mexico leading to the change, etc. And later in 1955 in Bandung came the common front of the Non-Aligned countries of Asia and Africa. What was common in these movements? Not rejection of capitalism, but imperialism and submission to the imperialist center. Those most ~~radial~~ radical of the movements understood anti-imperialism needed to be associated with socially radical transformation; that is moving to socialism. There were also others less radical who were still anti-imperialism, like Nassarism and so on.

That is the first wave of 20th century; now we have the second wave, starting also from the peripheries. In Latin America the movements have changed the power system partly. Now it is not Cuba who is being isolated, it is the US isolated vis-à-vis a number of Latin American countries. It is the very first step, moving slowly toward somewhere else.

Now the question is, will China support that and understand this as building a common front against the US hegemony associated with NATO and Japan? If so, that will reinforce the capacity of China on its path, not reduce it. If we take from this point of view, the Chinese diplomacy is far lower than what is needed. It has made nice declaration, peaceful, not imperialist, but nothing more than that.

When the Western power, the US, Europe, Japan and their agencies such as the World Bank and so on, goes to a country in Africa, what do they say? First they say, you have to submit, to accept all the rules of the WTO and of globalized capitalism, to privatize everything, etc. and then we will come and help you. But when China goes to an African country, they don't say the same language; they say we know what we want, and it is perfectly legitimate. Then they say what do you want? If the African country says we want industries or infrastructures, China is prepared and can help with technologies etc. That is different and good, but thereafter if there is one man who is corrupt in the government African and says I want 100 million dollars in my pocket, there is big temptation to say OK and we will do whatever we want. It is wrong because this is antagonizing the people and makes China appear just like a normal imperialist country. I think Chinese diplomacy should contribute positively to the industrialization and infrastructure in other countries of the Third World, if so, it will create strong links and a stronger common front facing imperialism.

Ironically China now is playing the most active role in sustaining the dying system of capitalism by lending huge amounts of money to the US and Europe. I don't think

there is much the people can do to change it. What do you think?

This is short-run, and I won't repeat it too much. The Chinese progressive elites should first understand the essence of the question; they have influence on the country. What is also important is to re-politicize the Chinese people. This re-politicization is starting from the rural areas by movements of the renewal and rural reconstruction, and we saw it in various areas. What is missing is in the urban middle classes.

I am less pessimistic than you are, because there are other two things which are positive in China. One, the Chinese people have a long history of the capacity of struggle; there are people who know how to struggle. From Taiping, which was a response to colonization and the Opium War, to 1911, to Sun Zhongshan, and to Mao, it is a long history of capacity of struggle. Two, associated to the above factor, most of the people, not all, in China including the middle class who are depoliticized today are patriots. Assuming the worse, assuming the Chinese leadership made the bad choices of removing collective property of land to the benefit private property and of going to globalized financilization, say, the Yuan becomes a flexible currency and no more controlled by the Chinese government but by the market, the banks are privatized and open to foreign banks – the results will be disastrous, I am sure the people will react very very fast. I do not hope all of that; I hope the Chinese leadership would understand that this is very dangerous for them.