

Deployment and erosion of the Bandung project

The Bandung conference of 1955 seemed to place a question mark over our guiding ideas of the post-war years: that the socialist revolution, through an uninterrupted process of stages, was on the agenda everywhere in Asia and Africa; that there was no longer room for a bourgeois-led national liberation; that the bourgeoisie, everywhere compradorized, could act only as an intermediary for a new-style imperialist domination, under the thumb of the United States. Now, suddenly, in addition to China, Vietnam and North Korea, there were independent regimes in Asia that had managed to stabilize themselves, whereas the various guerrilla campaigns had run out of steam. The India of Nehru's Congress Party, the Egypt of Nasser and the Indonesia of Sukarno were taking new initiatives both internally and in relation to imperialism as well as the USSR and China. These unexpected developments seemed to show that the bourgeoisie had not exhausted its historical role.

The central issue for debate throughout the period after 1955 was whether a capitalist solution was possible in the third world. What could capitalism really achieve there, and what were its limits? Should we be preparing for socialism to go beyond it? The ebb and flow of the national-bourgeois project in the third world was linked to the general evolution of capitalism in the West, to the USSR's entry into the international arena and the division of world politics into two military camps, and to the conflicts opposing Sovietism to Maoism and the USSR to China.

I give a central place to China's evolution because, after 1960, the perspective it offered seemed to break from the rut of Sovietism, which Maoism accused of taking a road that would lead to capitalism. The political regime in China drew important conclusions from this, both for revolutionary strategy in the third world (seen as the 'storm zone') and for analysis of the international situation and of the strategies of imperialism and (Soviet) 'social imperialism'. I should add that from 1957 to 1960 I almost fully shared the positions of the Chinese Communist Party, whereas after 1980 I had a more critical view of the Chinese openings to capitalism.

The Korean war (1950–53) and the first Vietnam War (1945–54) had already shown the limits to the power of the Western imperialist bloc; the second Vietnam War (1965–75) and the war in Cambodia (1970–75) clearly demonstrated that national liberation could take a radical form and even wear down the armies of the United States. In Africa, the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in 1974 also illustrated the dividend to be gained from a protracted armed struggle. But the Algerian War (1954–62) had eventually ended in a radical nationalist regime (Boumédienne), which we saw as in no way more promising than Nasserism.

History did not stop either with the Chinese Cultural Revolution or with the Vietnamese victory in 1975. In any event, the ebb and flow of socialist forces in China, Korea and Vietnam seemed to us the product of internal social conflict, not at all of external factors. I have not changed my mind about that since. Liberation, when

sufficiently advanced, reduces the weight of the external factor (which is obviously always unfavourable) and fully reinstates the decisive role of the internal class struggle. This is not to say, however, that the external factor disappears. In parallel with the ebb of socialist forces in East Asia, the region embarked upon phenomenal capitalist development that we had never expected (any more than the rest of the world had).

For Egypt the golden years of the Bandung project were 1955 to 1967, yet even then there were plenty of weaknesses. The failure of the union with Syria (1958–61), the persistent anticommunism, the toleration of traditionalist Islamic discourse, the elements of degeneration expressed in corruption: all these contributed to the eventual defeat. Subsequently, I was happy to see the fairly large section of socialist-minded youth attack the ‘new class’. But I have to say that I was worried when the regime, far from adopting the strategic perspectives of those young people, opted for a policy of concessions. After Nasser’s death (1970) and Sadat’s dramatic break with the left wing of Nasserism (May 1971), this policy became the so-called Infitah – an open-door compradorization which, still disguised until the 1973 war, took full and explicit shape at both regional and inter-national levels, when Sadat joined the American camp, visited Jerusalem and signed the Camp David accords (1977). The Infitah, then, appeared to me not the ‘counter-revolution’ that Egyptian Communists less critical of Nasserism held it to be, but rather the acceleration of a tendency that had been part of Nasserism itself. Twenty years later, I analysed in a similar way the open restoration of capitalism in the ex-USSR.

Whatever my own reservations, the peoples of the Arab world certainly saw Nasserism as liberatory and progressive. How often did I hear this said, and how often was I reproached for my own attitude, during those twenty decades! In my view, Nasserism shared with Baathism and the Algerian regime a number of negative features: a bourgeois vision of the future, a deep-rooted hostility to democracy, a second-rate pragmatic philosophy, an overestimation of Soviet support (rightly seen as mainly military), and a cheap cynicism that made them think they could ‘play the American card’ if the circumstances required it.

I placed greater hope in the poorer fringes of the Arab world (Sudan, South Yemen) and in the Palestinian struggle. In 1964 the Palestinian people finally created an organization of its own that took its distance from the Arab regimes. Its radicalism chimed with that of many popular movements of the time, and we expected a lot of it. But the slide of some Palestinian groups towards terrorism, as well as their behaviour in host countries (Jordan and later Lebanon), made it easier for local reactionary forces and imperialism to mount a counter-attack. That was how things remained until 1988, when the Palestinian intifada opened up a new perspective by waging the struggle directly in the occupied territories.

The years I spent in Bamako (1960–63) corresponded to the first wave of radicalization in Africa. The Guinean ‘No’ and Ghana’s independence in 1958, followed by the Malian choice of direction in September 1960, were the chief manifestations of this trend, but they were not the only ones. Lumumbism was

carrying the day in Congo, and between 1960 and 1963 there was reason to expect a similar radicalization in Congo-Léopoldville. In 1963, moreover, a popular uprising in Brazzaville put an end to the neo-colonial regime of Fulbert Youlou.

Still, I did not share the (in my view, infantile) optimism of those who saw 'African socialisms' as a new, almost radiant path; rather, there was for me an obvious analogy with Nasserism. But a battle is never lost if it is not begun. It was therefore necessary to begin the battle. If it was eventually lost, this was for the same reasons: immaturity of the vanguards, illusions maintained by the Soviet 'friend', imperialist interventions, and the appetites of a new embryonic bourgeoisie rooted in the state. The fact remains, however, that the first radical wave in Africa was followed by another: in 1964 Zanzibar carried out its revolution and got rid of the Sultan; and in 1967 Nyerere opted for socialism, as expressed in the Arusha Charter. It was necessary to wait until 1983 in Burkina Faso, where a new wave took shape around Thomas Sankara that drew the lessons from previous failures and emphasized more popular and democratic forms of action. In 1974 the military overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie, in a country where the revolutionary forces seemed to be powerful, although they were divided into mutually hostile groups (rather like the ones I had known in Egypt) and paralysed by the military dictatorship. They were also bogged down in a war in Eritrea, which the imperialist powers and their clients – or, at other times, nationalist regimes – kept completely ambiguous, and which the Soviet Union and Cuba sometimes muscled into, as in the Ogaden conflict of 1978, when Siyad Barre changed sides. In these conditions, the revolutionary forces, though exceptionally courageous, were unable to prevent the disintegration of their country. Meanwhile, in Madagascar, the same wave led to the fall of Tsiranana (1972), the attempted radicalization under the short-lived Ratsimandrava government (1973) and the consolidation of the system when Ratsiraka took the reins of power (1975).

Other developments, though less promising, indicated that neo-colonialism was incapable of overcoming its permanent crisis: for example, the successive coups in Congo and Benin (where Kérékou came to power in 1972), or the sliding of Kaunda's regime in Zambia towards a 'socialist' statism. By the late 1970s the crisis of neocolonialism was becoming general, as democratic demands either took on a genuinely popular dimension or remained more limited and susceptible to imperialist manipulation.

The long war of liberation in the Portuguese colonies naturally led to a radicalization of the movement, at least in terms of ideological formulations, although personally I had some reservations about Amílcar Cabral's theory that it could induce the petty bourgeoisie 'to commit suicide as a class'. Any such possibility greatly diminished when the sudden collapse of the Portuguese system in 1974 speeded up the achievement of independence.

The hard core of colonization lay in South Africa, and the Rhodesian whites thought they could hitch their wagon to it through a unilateral declaration of independence (in 1965). In fact, they were supported by the British mother country, and what unfolded was a comedy involving the usual hypocrisy. Here too the liberation struggle was finally victorious, and an independent Zimbabwe came into being in

1980. But at what price? By signing the Lancaster House Agreement, which stifled any serious attempt at agrarian and other social reforms, the Patriotic Front went down a road that naturally led to schizophrenia: it maintained a (doubtless sincere) left-wing discourse, while the structural adjustment programme it had to swallow brought a constant worsening of the social crisis.

Does the same fate lie ahead for South Africa? In my analysis of that country, I emphasize two characteristics that are too often overlooked. First, the project to make South Africa a modern industrial power by reducing the black workforce to semi-servitude – which was started by English settlers more than a century ago and developed under the forty-year apartheid regime – has ended in failure. South African industry is uncompetitive, and therefore, by the key criterion for the global capitalist economy, the RSA counts for no more than the few other ‘industrialized’ countries of Africa and the Middle East. The failure is certainly due to the resistance of the black working class, from Sharpeville (1960) to Soweto (1976), and the general civil insurgency that led De Klerk to agree to talks in 1990. But it is also due to the incredible waste bound up with a ‘white’ minority that consumes as in the West without the same productivity. Second, South Africa is a kind of microcosm of the world capitalist system: a minority of first world consumers, a large active army of ‘township’ labour concentrated in the mines, industry and colonial-style agriculture, and a no less sizeable reserve army in the Bantustans and the informal sector surrounding the cities. Under these conditions, what will become of the compromise associated with the end of apartheid? External forces hold out the prospect of an ‘advantage’ that the black majority will inherit from the ‘fine industrial infrastructure’, so long as it helps the country to become ‘competitive’ in line with the spirit of the age. In other words, the working majority is being asked to pay more to achieve what capital, with global financial, economic and political support, has failed to achieve.

In Asia, the Bandung project can claim less fragile achievements, especially in East Asia (to which I shall return below).

There can be no doubt that the conventional view of Congress-ruled India, with its spotlight on parliamentary democracy and competitive industrialization, is too favourable. The Indian left rightly tempers such overhasty judgements. Even in the days of Nehru (who died in 1964), the Indian industrial bourgeoisie, allied to the large northern property owners and the state technocracy, never saw its project as conflicting with transnational capital. It pays the price for this, in so far as its control of technology and finance is today more apparent than real. Parliamentary democracy, the only reasonable way of managing in this vast country the set of regionally differentiated hegemonic social alliances, has not prevented – indeed, rests upon – the social marginalization of the poor. The exhaustion of the project, which looked so nationalist when it first got off the ground, is today evident enough.

The Shah’s dictatorship, restored after the fall of Mossadegh in 1953, launched Iran on a state-led modernizing programme which, though conservative in its social dimension, had some major achievements to its credit. Its Achilles heel was the anti-democratic spirit in which it unfolded, made worse by an unqualified option for

Western culture. But the Islamic Revolution of 1978–79, which put an end to this experiment with a right-wing Bandung, is incapable of coming up with a real alternative that goes beyond religious rhetoric.

If Iran is no longer a threat to the dominant capitalism, could Afghanistan have become one? The small-scale revolution that replaced the Daud regime with a modernizing populist government would undoubtedly have come up against its natural limits; the para-communist ideology in which the modernizing intellectuals expressed themselves would, in my view, have gradually been adjusted. But the Soviet intervention of 1979, by playing off the ‘parties’ of the intelligentsia against one another, provided an unexpected opportunity for the United States to mire the Soviet armies in the region and to nip Afghan modernization projects in the bud. In supporting the Islamists – who, after their victory in 1992, predictably plunged the country into an endless war even more appalling than the last – the Western powers again displayed the cynicism with which they treat the peoples of the region and the hypocrisy of their democratic discourse.

Latin America was not present at Bandung and never planned to join the non-aligned group. There were at least three reasons for this: the fact that the countries in the region have been independent since the nineteenth century; the dominance of European culture; and the long-standing influence of the United States and its acceptance by the local ruling classes. Nevertheless, after the Second World War, Latin America underwent a parallel evolution to that which took place in Africa and Asia under the banner of Bandung, essentially because of the objectively analogous position of its peripheral capitalism in relation to the world system. Three experiences here deserve to be grouped in the category of radical third world experiences.

The first is that of Cuba, which managed to liberate itself in 1959.

Washington soon realized that Castroism was a real danger, as its attempt to reconquer the country in 1961 (the Bay of Pigs invasion) amply demonstrates. The US threat weighed heavily on the island and (given the economic boycott by the United States and its European allies) intensified its dependence on the USSR. The episode of the missiles in 1962, which Khrushchev and Castro skilfully negotiated, helped to send Castroism veering towards the Soviet model, to the detriment of its potential to develop in a more democratic and less artificial direction.

The second experience was the democratic (in the traditional parliamentary sense of the term) strategy attempted by the Allende regime in Chile, between 1970 and 1973. Chilean democracy found itself paralysed as a result and succumbed to the blows organized by Washington. The compradorization promoted by the bloody Pinochet dictatorship, with the help of the United States and Europe, has become a model to inspire the neocapitalists from Warsaw to Moscow. But has it really been such a success? That is certainly not my view, both because the social price of ‘adjustment’ has been exorbitant, and because, within the very logic of globalized capitalism, Chile’s place will remain that of a producer amenable to the ‘putting out’ operations of dominant capital and its local allies. It holds no prospect of an acceptable future for Chile’s popular classes.

The third experience followed the overthrow of Somoza in Nicaragua, in 1979. Drawing some lessons from history, the Sandinista movement tried to avoid the excesses of a statism confused with socialism, to practise a more genuine democracy, and to preserve a broad range of external relations. This did not spare it the hostility of the United States, which supported the Contra war, nor the rallying of a faint-hearted Europe to the views of Washington. In these circumstances the Sandinista withdrawal from government, following the elections of 1989, was an honourable result that could allow the popular forces to remain intact for other battles in the future.

The call by third world countries for a 'New International Economic Order' (1975) marked the end of Bandung as an active project, since a second wind for the national-bourgeois project required the North to 'adjust' to demands for globalized capitalist expansion under acceptable conditions. The proposed reform of the international order fitted into this line of thinking. But its rejection by the Western powers drove it home that national-bourgeois construction on the periphery of the system is a utopian project. What followed was therefore a unilateral adjustment by the periphery to the requirements of globally dominant capital – that is, to a new wave of compradorization.

It may appear extreme to make the national-bourgeois project in the three peripheral continents central to the history of the period. I would insist, however, that throughout the post-war period the huge political and social transformations in those continents (where the great majority of the world's population lives) were the main axis around which the world order was organized. They were major qualitative transformations, incomparably greater in their long-term impact than the calmer tendencies operating in the societies of the capitalist core – although in some respects the latter did play an important role in the evolution of the world system.

Is not the truth of this statement implicitly accepted by those who maintain the exaggerated, but no less significant, view that East Asia is becoming the 'centre' of a new world? Whether a miracle or not, the capitalist development of Korea and Taiwan in exceptional geostrategic circumstances (expressed in concessions never granted elsewhere, and in agrarian and other reforms made obligatory by the competition of the communist world) spread in different ways to South Asia and the vast expanse of China. Whereas, for South Asia, the model appears to be one of dependent comprador capitalism largely dominated by the transnationals, the experiences of Korea and China cannot be reduced to that. Are we talking there of forms of national capitalist development? Has history, contrary to what was said above, proved that such forms are possible? Are they capable of gradually closing the gap between centre and periphery – that is, of creating new capitalist centres? Or, despite the successes, has the polarization been taking new forms, so that these regions will become the true peripheries of tomorrow's globalized capitalism, while the rest are simply marginalized?

Later developments in the region – above all, the financial crisis of Southeast Asia and Korea – are in my view the harbinger of a protracted war. Taking the opportunity of Korea's ultimately minor financial crisis (France and Britain have known dozens

of greater severity since the war), the United States tried to force Seoul to dismantle its national oligopolies and to open up the country to foreign capital. The most specious arguments were mobilized for this purpose. Can one imagine the IMF declaring that the solution to the US financial crisis (a twenty-year external deficit higher than Korea's in per capita terms) is the forced selling-off of Boeing to its European rival, Airbus? It is clear what is at stake. Will Korea be able to achieve the status of a major capitalist centre? Or will it assume a subaltern place in the new global polarization that lies ahead? The subaltern-comprador fate can hardly be doubted in most of the new third world (Southeast Asia and Latin America), but the war is only just beginning over Korea, China and perhaps India. A counteroffensive against American aggression may be shaping up, initially centred on the control of speculative movements of capital. History remains open.

In any event, these transformations in the third world, and especially its uneven industrialization, are not simply the result of the unilateral expansionist logic of the dominant sections of capital, but also correspond to the struggles which third world societies, in varying measure, have waged against that logic. Bandung was not a uniform phenomenon. According to the social and political conditions in each country and the play of global and regional forces, we saw four sets of changes gradually work themselves out during the postwar cycle.

- . Clear-cut capitalist development, accompanied by a so-called 'liberal' ideology but often strongly marked by resolutely modernist state intervention, open to the world system but concerned to control any opening, always anti-democratic in its practices. South Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, Brazil and the Shah's Iran are typical of this model.
- . Various populist experiments, highly statist, never democratic, ambiguous about their relationship to globalization, usually calling themselves 'socialist', often supported by the USSR. Depending on their historical legacy, some of these experiments went further than others along the path of industrialization.
- . The self-styled 'Marxist' experiences of China, North Korea and Cuba, originating, like the Soviet experience, in a radical revolution inspired by the doctrines of the Third International. Their present orientation, explicit in the case of China, is now towards a capitalism that claims to control its relations with the dominant world system.
- . Experiences that never went beyond a banal neocolonial framework, so that their growth (Ivory Coast, Kenya, etc.) or persistent stagnation (the Sahel countries, etc.) was passively dependent on external stimuli.

As a whole, these huge transformations have left us with situations quite different from those that prevailed in 1945. The analytic key here is the criterion of globalized capitalism itself: the existence, or absence, of segments of the local productive system that are 'competitive' in global terms, or capable of becoming so without too much difficulty. Accordingly, we are now talking of a 'third' and a 'fourth' world.

The new third world consists of countries that have achieved sufficient 'modernization' in terms of global competitiveness: roughly speaking, all the larger countries of Latin America, the countries of East Asia (China, the two Koreas, Taiwan), Eastern Europe and the former USSR. This, for me, is tomorrow's real periphery. The new fourth world consists of all the other countries, essentially Africa and the Arab-Islamic world. This too seems to cover quite a large range: some have completed a few stages in the industrialization process but failed to become competitive (Egypt and South Africa, for example), while others have not even embarked upon the industrial revolution (the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia); some are financially 'rich' (mainly the oil-producing countries with a small population), while others are to a greater or lesser extent financially 'poor' (from Ivory Coast to Somalia). My criterion here is not per capita income but a capacity for productive insertion into the world system. There are also countries which, in varying degrees, combine these characteristics. India is a case in point.

All the popular classes of this third and fourth world face the same challenge, but the conditions of their struggle are different. The challenge is simply that peripheral capitalism offers them nothing acceptable at a social or political level. Yet third world social formations contain both a large active army of labour and a reserve army that cannot be absorbed into the labour force. The objective conditions exist there for a strong popular alliance to crystallize through struggles over management of the productive system and political and social democratization. Of course, a number of real obstacles stand in the way of such an alliance, not the least of which is the ideological obstacle bequeathed by Sovietism and the historical limits of Maoism. This is especially apparent in the countries of the old eastern bloc. Will its peoples manage to shake off their illusions in capitalism and avoid sinking into chauvinistic nationalism? China also apparently belongs to this group. Will its vanguard know how to renew Maoism and build into it a democratic component in the real sense of the term, by developing the autonomous organization of the popular classes as a counterweight to the concessions made to capitalism? As to the 'fourth world' social formations, whether 'rich' or 'poor', unindustrialized or very weakly industrialized and under threat from neo-compradorization, they are virtually reducible to an ill-defined 'people' on the one hand, lacking roots in a viable productive system, and 'the powers that be' on the other hand. Consequently, the shifting of conflicts to the spheres of the imagination is a real, and no doubt disastrous, aspect of the problem facing these societies. In the Arab and Islamic world, the marriage of oil money with an outdated programmatic discourse – which, despite its 'fundamentalist' pretensions, is fundamentally traditionalist – represents the best guarantee of success for the imperialist programme of regional compradorization. In sub-Saharan Africa, the flight into mythology sometimes takes different forms, such as eruptions of ethnicism that may lead to a total break-up of the country.

Given the collapse of the Bandung project, were we not right to maintain in the 1955–75 period that the national bourgeoisie had exhausted its historical role, that the project of national capitalist development was obsolete and utopian? Was it not light-minded to accuse of ‘ultra-leftism’ those who argued that the Bandung project would reach a dead end because of its bourgeois character and that the pseudo-concept of a non-capitalist path was fundamentally opportunist? When I reread what I wrote at the time, I remain convinced that the general line of those analyses was correct. And, although it may seem lacking in modesty, I would even go so far as to say that some of them were quite perspicacious. Here are a few examples:

- The near-premonition (in 1960) that the ‘natural’ end of Nasserism would be the forms that came to be known as Infitah.
- The warning against a possible neo-comprador solution in the Middle East, which would include building Israel into an overall regional picture.
- My analysis in 1965 of the Ivory Coast ‘miracle’, in opposition to the World Bank forecasts that were later belied by the facts.
- My view in 1975 that the best solution in Angola would be to continue stubbornly working for a coalition government of all the liberation movements. I am not convinced that such efforts would have succeeded, but nor am I sure that everything was done to achieve that end. Today, after seventeen years of pointless war, this solution will perhaps impose itself, but in a form bordering on farce.
- The fears I expressed in 1972–74 that a compromise solution was on the cards in Zimbabwe and South Africa – which eventually went by the name of Lancaster House in Zimbabwe and a ‘federal solution’ in post-apartheid South Africa.

(Memories pages 169-181)