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MAOISM'S CONTRIBUTION

The Marxism of the Second International, workerist and Eurocentric, shared with the dominant ideology of the era a linear view of historical progress in which every society must pass first through a stage of capitalist development before being able to aspire to socialism. The idea that the “development” of some societies (the dominant centers) and the “underdevelopment” of others (the dominated peripheries) is an imminent product of the worldwide expansion of capitalism was completely alien.

Understanding the polarization inherent in capitalist globalization is essential for formulating any view about transcending capitalism. This polarization lies behind the possible rallying of large fractions of the popular classes and above all the middle classes (whose development is itself favored by the position of the center in the world system) of the dominant countries to social-colonialism. At the same time, it transforms the peripheries into a *zone des tempêtes*, in a continual natural rebellion against the capitalist world order. Certainly rebellion is not synonymous with revolution, but only with the possibility of revolution. On the other hand, grounds for rejecting the capitalist model are not lacking in the center of the system, as 1968, among other things, illustrated. Undoubtedly, the formulation of the challenge by the Communist Party of China (CPC), at a given moment, in terms of the country-side encircling the cities, is too extreme to be useful. A global strategy of transition beyond capitalism in the direction of world socialism must articulate the struggles in both the centers and peripheries of the system.

Initially, Lenin kept some distance from the dominant theory of the Second International and successfully led a revolution in the “weak link” (Russia), though always with the conviction that this would be followed by a wave of socialist revolutions in Europe. This was a disappointed hope. Lenin then formulated a view that stressed transforming rebellions in the East into revolutions. The CPC and Mao would systematize this new perspective.

The Russian Revolution had been led by a party firmly entrenched in the working class and radical intelligentsia. Its alliance with the peasantry (represented by the Socialist Revolutionary Party) was naturally vital. The radical agrarian reform that resulted finally satisfied an old dream of the Russian peasantry: to become property owners. But this historical compromise carried the seeds of its own demise : the market produced on its own, as always, growing differentiation within the peasantry (the well-known phenomenon of “kulakisation”).

The Chinese Revolution set out from the beginning (or at least from the 1930s) on bases that guaranteed a solid alliance with the poor and middle peasantry. Moreover, the national dimension, the war of resistance against Japanese aggression, also made it possible for the communists to recruit widely from the bourgeois classes that were disappointed by the weaknesses and betrayals of the Kuomintang. The Chinese Revolution consequently produced a new situation, different from that of post revolutionary Russia. The radical peasant revolution did away with the idea of private property in agrarian land and substituted a guarantee for all peasants of equal access to the land. Up till now this decisive advantage, which is common to no other country except Vietnam, is the major obstacle to a devastating

expansion of agrarian capitalism. The debates underway in China revolve, in great part, around this question. But the rallying of numerous bourgeois nationalists to the Communist Party should have a ideological influence that is favorable to supporting the deviations of those whom Mao called “capitalist roaders”.

The post revolutionary regime in China has to its credit a good many political, cultural, material and economic achievements (industrialization of the country, radicalization of its modern political culture etc.). Maoist China also resolved the “peasant problem” that lay at the center of the decline of the Empire during two decisive centuries, 1750-1950, as described in my work “*The Future of Maoism*”. Moreover, Maoist China succeeded in achieving these results by avoiding the most tragic excesses of the Soviet Union: collectivization was not imposed by murderous violence, as was the case with Stalinism; opposition within the Party did not give rise to the institution of terror (Deng Xiaoping was removed, he returned). The objective of relative equality involving not only the distribution of income among peasants and workers but also between them and the ruling strata was pursued tenaciously, with ups and downs. It was formalized in development strategies that clearly contrast with those of the USSR (these choices were formulated in “ten great balances” at the beginning of the 1960s). It was these successes that account for post Maoist China’s extraordinary growth beginning in the 1980s. The contrast with India, which has not had a revolution, assumes its full significance here, not only in accounting for the different paths followed during the decades 1950 to 1980 but also for probable future prospects. It is these successes that explain why post Maoist China, henceforth incorporating its development into the new capitalist globalization has not suffered from destructive shocks similar to those that followed the collapse of the USSR.

The successes of Maoism have not, for all that, definitively settled the question of the long term prospects for socialism. The development strategy of 1950-1980 had exhausted its potential and, among other things, an opening (albeit controlled) was imperative. As the result demonstrated, this involved the risk of reinforcing the tendencies of an evolution in a capitalist direction. Simultaneously, the system of Maoist China combined contradictory tendencies that both strengthened and weakened socialist options.

Conscious of this contradiction, Mao attempted to bend the stick in favor of socialism through the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1974). An appeal went out to “bombard the headquarters” (the Party’s Central Committee), seat of the bourgeois aspirations of the political class. Mao believed that, to undertake this course of correction, he could rely on the youth (who, among other things, greatly inspired the 1968 events in Europe; see Jean Luc Godard’s film “*La Chinoise*”). The result of these events demonstrated the error of this judgment. The Cultural Revolution came to a close; the partisans of the capitalist path were encouraged to go on the offensive.

The struggle between the long and difficult socialist path and the capitalist option is certainly not over for good. The conflict between capitalism and socialism is the “clash of civilizations” of our time. In this struggle, the Chinese people have some significant assets, which are the heritage of the revolution and of Maoism. These assets exist in various spheres of social life. They are forcefully apparent in the peasantry’s defense of state ownership of agricultural land and guaranteed access to it for all.

Maoism contributed decisively to making an accurate assessment of the issues and the challenges represented by global capitalist expansion. It allowed us to bring into focus the

challenge of the contrast between the center and the periphery immanent to the expansion of capitalism, and then to draw all the lessons that's this implies for the socialist struggle, in the dominant centers as well as the dominated peripheries. These conclusions have been summarized in a wonderful Chinese-style phrase: "Countries want independence, nations want liberation and the people want revolution". Countries, that is, the ruling classes of countries, when they are something other than lackeys, intermediaries for outside forces, devote themselves to enlarging their space for movement. This enables them to maneuver in the world system and raise themselves to the position of active participants in the shaping of the world order. Nations, that is, historical blocs of potentially progressive classes want liberation, development and modernization. People, that is, the dominated and exploited classes, aspire to socialism. The phrase allows us to understand the real world in all its complexity and therefore formulate effective strategies for action. It is part of the viewpoint that it is a long – very long – transition from capitalism to world socialism, which breaks with the short transition concept of the Third International.