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Building convergence in diversity

Building the convergence of all social and political movements through which the victims of the global new-liberal capitalist order express themselves certainly demands the respect of their diversity.

I propose here to categorise all social and political forces (left or right) which operate in the contemporary world by combining their positions on five axes that define five major criteria of the possible options:

- (i) The intensity of radicalism in the critique of capitalism will be measured on the OX axis. Unconditional supporters of the new-liberal order are placed at point O. Next to them are those who have yielded to its main demands and advocate cosmetic reform with a view to save capitalism from the excesses of new-liberalism (in line with George Soros' formula). The World Bank discourse, and programmes that intend to "alleviate poverty" (without questioning the new-liberal system that generates this poverty) are part of a right-wing strategy, the real objective of which is to weaken, not strengthen, peoples' movements. Further on the axis are the moderate reformists who in the current environment advocate for the defence of established rights currently threatened (including workers' rights, social security, education and health). Further towards X are the radical reformists whose proposals open up to a social logic that goes beyond capitalism. These radical reformists are close to the positions of those who define themselves by the outlook of a socialist society.
- (ii) The intensity of radicalism in the critique of capitalist globalisation will be measured on the OY axis. Unconditional supporters of globalisation as it is, and others who regard it as overall not just "without alternative", but also potentially positive, are close to point O. According to them, globalisation could offer opportunities that have to be seized. Further towards Y are those who are aware of the imperialist dimension of capitalist globalisation as it is, and in particular of its new-liberal form, as well as of the reality of US hegemonism.
- (iii) The degree of radicalism of the concepts of democracy one proposes to enforce will be measured along the OZ1 axis. Openly antidemocratic positions run through the contemporary world. They are found not just in the South and the ex-East, in particular in the new comprador classes and powers aligned with the new imperialist and new liberal project and with those nostalgic of populism and sovietism, but also in the North, not just in the United States (where the Christian and parafundamentalist, new Maccarthyst inspired right represents nearly half of the Republican voters), but also in traditionally democratic Europe (new populisms, Haider and Berlusconi style, bear witness to this). Further towards the centre of this axis we will find most of the people content with minimal democratic practices. This ranges from electoral farce (in the United States and throughout the Third World) to "low-intensity democracy" based on a so-called depoliticised consensus. In this instance, the vote, whether for the right or for the left, is devoid of all meaning, as elected governments accept the helplessness that results from the inevitability of the "laws of the market". On this axis, the left is defined by the fight it intends to carry out to give democracy the emancipating sense it should carry, encompassing from the start all the dimensions of the challenge of affirming human and citizen rights, individual and group social rights, as well as the right to control the economic system. As they get more radical, these claims tend to meet those of social projects which go "beyond capitalism".

- (iv) The degree of radicalism in positions on gender issues is measured on axis OZ2. Close to point O are the asserted antifeminist ideologies (based on religious fundamentalism in the United States and the Islamic, Hindu and Confucian worlds) as well as de facto machist behaviours. Further on the axis are the political currents ready to adopt feminist claims, provided they do not question the capitalist (or new-liberal) order. Like radical democracy, radical feminism necessarily rests on an emancipation logic that opens up to an outlook “beyond capitalism”. The strong parallelism of positions taken along the OZ1 and OZ2 axes precisely results from the intimate link between feminist and democratic claims and the emancipation outlook. Emancipation requires the radicalisation of both the democratic and the feminist claims.
- (v) It would be useful to consider the fifth dimension of these challenges, and define the degree of radicalism in the ecologist critique of the dominant world order. Close to point O are those who ignore the challenges, a position taken by the establishment in the United States, where the future of the planet is sacrificed to the short-term profits of transnational corporations and the continuation of the wasteful American lifestyle. Further on the axis are the naïve environmentalists who refuse to acknowledge the destructive dimension of capitalism, which cannot be dissociated from the short-term financial calculations that define the very relative “rationality” of this mode of production. In contrast, radical ecologists, aware of this link, get closer to the radical critics of capitalism. Because the critique of capitalism and the ecologist critique must logically be closely associated, it should be possible to merge the OX2 axis, on which the radicalism of the ecologist critique is measured, with the OX axis.

All ideological positions, political forces and social movements can be located on either one of the two plans defined by the OX-OY and OX-OZ axes, or in the three-dimensional OX-OY-OZ space. Each of these plans can be divided in quadrants, whereas the three-dimensional space can be divided in eight cubic components (see chart).

In such a space, some regions are practically empty, as the combination of criteria taken into account is too contradictory for these criteria to co-exist. In contrast, other combinations show the locations where the dominant right wing forces concentrate. Finally, many of the still fragmented social and political movements that constitute, at least in part, the potential of the left alternative are scattered throughout the corresponding space.

To be rallied around new liberal theses and the associated dominant globalisation outlook today means to be right wing, even if one votes for the left (as is often the case in Europe) or subscribes to a discourse (but just a discourse) with nationalist and anti-imperialist tones (which may happen in the South). The mainstream hegemonic right is situated in quadrants A and E (the three-dimensional AE space), at best moderately reformist, and based on the democratic consensus, as understood in the common language. This right, which in Europe represents the majority across the whole spectrum of political parties, is being outflanked on the right, in particular in the United States, by non-democratic ideological and social movements, violently antifeminist and racist. The new-McCarthyism of the Republican establishment includes this so-called “moral front” in a power-sharing alliance. In the South and ex-East peripheries, the *compradore* right, which represents most of the de facto powers, finds a social base in the circles of “speculators” promoted by the new-liberal globalisation. The term “speculators”, frequently used in the Third World and ex-Soviet countries, illustrates well the nature and fragility of this artificial, hardly democratic or entrepreneurial “bourgeoisie”. The hachured areas in quadrants A and E indicate the areas where these hegemonic rights are positioned.

The left to be built, radically against the new-liberal order, at least anti-hegemonic if not anti-imperialist, and democratically advanced, must be found at the antipodes, e.g. in quadrants D and H (or the DH three-dimensional space). But all the forces and movements involved in the current struggle against the dominant right-wing powers are not necessarily situated in this area. In the capitalist centres, there is a left wing, sometimes even a radical one, which shows little sensitivity to the imperialist dimension of the system. The anti-imperialist awareness is currently very weakened throughout the North. The national liberation movements around which the “third-worldist” youth had mobilised have drifted and fed subsequent disappointments. In the peripheries, there are people with a nostalgia for sovietism and hardly democratic populism, who are nonetheless critical of new-liberalism and/or imperialism. Other segments of ideological and political forces in the periphery with better future potential yearn to defend legitimate national interests. A number of governments in these regions seem to have rallied globalisation only under constraint, as they estimate that they had no possibility to refuse. These forces currently swing between the illusion of a scarcely democratic right-wing nationalism (this is an understatement), whereby they accept to align with a new-liberal global order and nevertheless believe they can still “negotiate”, and an eventual alliance with a democratic and anti-imperialist peoples’ front. Only in the latter case will they gather real strength and rally the side of the global left to be built. If not, they will remain indecisive or be attracted by chauvinistic ethnicism or pseudo-religious fundamentalism (as in the case of political Islam or Hinduism). These anti-democratic movements, which de facto accept to subject their people to the demands of global capitalism, are, in spite of a rhetorical, cultural and anti-Western discourse, part of the worldwide right-wing alliance.

The building of a left-wing alternative requires the development, here and there, of strategies and tactics calling for the rallying of all left of centre political forces, all ideological currents and all social movements involved in struggling with either new-liberalism, or imperialism, or towards democratic advances, women’s liberation or the respect of the requirements of a sound, ecologist management of the planet.

The centre left, indicated by a cross in quadrant D, is the central starting point for the strategies and tactics suggested here.

It is indeed possible to attract towards this point many of the fragmented movements scattered in the three-dimensional space that illustrates our point. There is no reason to think that the reformists, the promoters of democracy, of women’s rights, of peoples’ rights, of ecology, or the peace movements are and will remain unable to draw the lessons of the failures of the “moderate” options that characterise, still today, many of their positions. However, not all will be able to do so, and we must accept this. There will remain reformists who will be satisfied with cosmetic reform and remain unable to see that they are co-opted by the dominant right. There will be revolutionaries who will indefinitely accept to remain locked in dogmatic ghettos and avoid confronting the question of how they could help mankind move towards their own societal project.

It is also possible to drive the currents, if not the organisations, of the anti-imperialist segments of the public opinion in the South towards more consistent positions that could receive wide popular support. However, there will always remain fragments of these forces that will be attracted by compradores, as there will always remain peoples’ movements drifting further towards culturalism.

The hegemonic right-wing front is much less strong than what it seems. It is crossed with contradictions that will only get deeper as its project apparently looks more “successful”. This right-wing coalition is doomed to split. The South, which has nothing to gain from this project, is composed of a series of “weak links” (China, India, Brazil, South Africa and others). The North will itself see the democratic, humanistic and socialist tradition rooted in European history erect a growing hurdle to the catastrophic outlook of US hegemonism. Capitalism certainly does not represent the “unsurpassable horizon”, as many ideologues and leaders of progressive peoples’ movements think. In the immediate future, struggles can only be fought against new-liberalism (the extreme reactionary form of capitalism) or the arrogant hegemonism of the United States, that spearheads new imperialism. As they score successes in this direction, these struggles will get more radical.

The world will remain crowded with what I call “drifting politicians”. What I mean by this is these active men and women who remain prisoners of a fundamentally opportunistic conception of politics. They believe that politics means taking advantage of the balance of forces as it is. In contrast, radicals and revolutionaries mean to transform this balance. Drifting politicians are not necessarily insensitive to the opinions of the segments of society on which their success depends (whether in an electoral system or not). As a result, they are visual navigators on an ocean strewn with reefs without always knowing where this will lead them. Many of them will rally the left if it reconstitutes and reverses the balance of forces. They will not always do so out of sheer opportunism or to advance their own career, but also because in this left they will find values to which they are wedded. Reformists here and revolutionaries there are, at least partly, moved by these values which are ours.

Building convergence means building this necessary left. The step-by-step reinforcement of convergence in diversity will therefore manifest itself by the enlargement of a circle around the centre left point situated in quadrant D. To this point corresponds a centre left point in quadrant H. These two points coincide to form the centre of the sphere of convergences in the three-dimensional space. When this circle on each of the ABCD and EFGH surfaces (or on the corresponding sphere) eventually fills a significant part of the relevant surfaces (or volume), the battle will be won, as the balance of forces will shift to the benefit of working classes and people.

Convergence building can be formulated in political terms that in various ways complement each other.

“For a united front in support of social and international justice.” Emphasising that the two concepts are inseparable, that social justice in the centres must be matched by a clear anti-imperialist conscience, that anti-imperialism in the peripheries has no future if it is not supported by working classes aspiring to social justice and democracy.

“The democratic State in the long transition beyond unbridled capitalism is a State that imposes social and citizen regulation.” Or “socialisation by citizen and social democracy includes, whereas socialisation markets excludes”. Or “no answer to social needs is possible without democracy, and no democracy is possible without answering social needs”.

These “slogans” draw lessons from recent history. In the South, governments which accepted to restrict their will to democratise to the limits imposed by the new-liberal order contributed to discredit democracy (see the tragic Argentine example), as they called for a return to either

populism or violent dictatorship subordinated to imperialism. In the North the left-right consensus of electoral majorities around the economic liberalisation substitutes the US form of “low-intensity democracy” for the citizen and social democracy of left-wing movements. It also perpetuates the conditions of the fragmentation of resistances and destroys hopes that an anti-imperialist conscience will mature.

Convergence, i.e. the widening of the central circle, does not exclude diversity but strengthens it and unleashes its potential, as the these circles then cover substantial areas of each of the quadrants on our chart. The challenge is to build this convergence. No force through which the victims of unbridled capitalism, modern imperialism, or US hegemonism and the global war it conducts against the peoples of the South express their voices can ignore that it will progress towards achieving immediate and limited, or longer-term, objectives only if it affirms the solidarity of all the segments of a global united front for social justice and international justice.