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IMPERIALISM, PAST AND PRESENT

IMPERIALISM, THE PERMANENT STAGE OF REALLY EXISTING GLOBALIZED CAPITALISM

The confusion created in the dominant discourse between the concept of "free market economy" and that of "capitalism" is the root cause of a dangerous relaxation of the criticism levelled against the policies implemented. The "market", which naturally refers to competition, is not "capitalism", the content of which is specifically defined by the limit to the competition therefore implicit in the monopoly of private property, including the oligopolistic control (by certain groups, to the exclusion of others). "Market" and "Capitalism" are two distinct concepts, the really existing capitalism being the very opposite of the what the imaginary market constitutes.

On the other hand, the capitalism abstractly viewed as a mode of production, is based on a market integrated into its three dimensions (market for products of social work, financial market and labour market). However, the capitalism considered as a really existing global system is based on the universal expansion of the market in its first two dimensions alone, since the creation of a real world labour market is obscured by the perpetual existence of national political boundaries, despite the economic globalisation, which is therefore always truncated. Hence, the really existing capitalism is necessarily polarising on the global scale and the unequal development it engenders becomes the most violent and increasing contradiction that cannot be surmounted through the logic of capitalism.

The "Centres" are the product of history, which permitted, in certain regions of the capitalist system, the establishment of a national bourgeois hegemony and a State that can equally be referred to as national capitalist. Bourgeoisie and bourgeois State are inseparable in this context and it is only the so-called "liberal" ideology that can speak of a capitalistic economy, setting the State aside, contrary to all expectations. The bourgeois State assumes national dimensions when it controls the accumulation process, certainly within the limits of external constraints, but that is when such constraints are highly relativised by its own capacity to respond to their action, or even to take part in formulating them.

For their part, the "peripheries" are simply defined in negative terms : they constitute the regions that are not established as centres in the global capitalist system. They therefore represent countries and regions that do not control locally the accumulation process which is consequently influenced mainly by the external constraints. For this reason, the peripheries are not "stagnant", although their development is not similar to the one characterising the centres in the successive stages of the global expansion of capitalism. The bourgeoisie and local capital are not necessarily absent from the local socio-political scene and the peripheries are not synonymous with "pre-capitalist societies". But the State's formal existence is not synonymous with the national capitalist State even if the local bourgeoisie amply controls this machinery inasmuch as it does not control the accumulation process.

Imperialism is therefore not a stage, not even the highest stage, of capitalism : from the beginning, it is inherent in capitalism's expansion. The imperialist conquest of the planet by

the Europeans and their North American children was carried out in two phases and is perhaps entering a third.

The first phase of this devastating enterprise was organized around the conquest of the Americas, in the framework of the mercantilist system of Atlantic Europe at the time.

The disastrous results of this first chapter of world capitalist expansion (genocide of the Indians, slavery) produced, some time later, the forces of liberation that challenged the logics that produced them. The first revolution of the Western Hemisphere was that of the slaves of Saint Domingue (present day Haiti) at the end of the eighteenth century, followed more than a century later by the Mexican revolution of the decade of 1910, and fifty years after that by the Cuban revolution. And if I do not cite here either the famous “American revolution” or that of the Spanish colonies that soon followed, it is because those only transferred the power of decision from the metropolis to the colonists so that they could go on doing the same thing, pursue the same project with even greater brutality, but without having to share the profits with the “mother country”.

The second phase of imperialist devastation was based on the industrial revolution and manifested itself in the colonial subjection of Asia and Africa. “To open the markets” and to seize the natural resources of the globe were the real motives here, as everyone knows

At the same time, these prodigious achievements of capitalist civilization gave rise to the most violent confrontations between the imperialist powers that the world has ever seen. Imperialist aggression again produced the forces that resisted its project : the socialist revolutions that took place in Russia and China (not accidentally in the peripheries that were victims of the polarizing expansion of really existing capitalism) and the revolutions of national liberation. Their victory brought about a half century of respite, the period after the Second World War, which nourished the illusion that capitalism, compelled to adjust to the new situation, had at last managed to become civilized.

Today we see the beginning of a third wave of devastation of the world by imperialist expansion, encouraged by the collapse of the Soviet system and of the regimes of populist nationalism in the Third World. The objectives of dominant capital are still the same – the control of the expansion of markets, the looting of the earth’s natural resources, the super-exploitation of the labour reserves in the periphery – although they are being pursued in conditions that are new and in some respects very different from those that characterized the preceding phase of imperialism

The legacy of the XXth century : the South confronted with the new globalisation

1. During the post World War II period, which I call the “Bandung period” (1955-1975) the States of the Third World had instituted policies of (real or potential) autocentric development, almost exclusively on a national scale, precisely in an effort to reduce world polarisation, to “catch up”. The result of the uneven success of these policies was to produce a contemporary Third world composed of countries very different from each other.

In any event where industrialisation has made the most marked progress, the peripheries always contain huge “reserves”, by which I mean that very large, although varying, proportions of their labour forces are employed (when they are employed) in activities having

low productivity. This is because the policies of modernisation – that is, the attempts to “catch up” – impose technological choices that are themselves modern (in order to be efficient, perhaps even competitive), choices that are extremely expensive in terms of the utilisation of scarce resources (capital and skilled labour). This systemic imbalance is further aggravated whenever the modernisation in question is accompanied by a growing inequality in the distribution of income. Under these conditions the contrast between the centers and the peripheries remains extreme. In the former this passive reserve, which does exist, is a minority (varying from time to time according to circumstances but almost always, no doubt, less than 20 %). In the latter it is always a majority.

2. Let us suppose that the present dominant tendencies remain the principal active force determining the evolution of both the system as whole and its various component parts. In that case, what might be the evolution of the relations between what I shall call the active army of labour (the totality of workers engaged, at least potentially, in competitive activities on the world market) and the passive reserve (the others that is, not only the marginalized and the unemployed but also those employed in low productivity activities, who are condemned to poverty) ?

In the centers, it will probably be impossible to reconstitute a large, permanent reserve army and to refocus the economy on activities connected with the five monopolies (identified below). The political system of the Triad will hardly permit that. In one way or another, then, violent explosions will cause the movement to branch off from the paths laid out by the neo-liberal option (which will therefore become untenable). It will turn either to the left, in the direction of new and progressive social compromises, or to the right, in the direction of national populisms with fascist tendencies.

In the peripheries, even the most dynamic of them, for the reasons given above it will be impossible for the expansion of modernised productive activities to absorb the huge reserves presently occupied in low productivity activities. The dynamic peripheries will therefore remain peripheries that is, societies riddled with all the major contradictions produced by the existence of modernised enclaves (even large ones) surrounded by vast areas that are only slightly modernised, these contradictions helping to keep them in a subaltern position, subservient to the five monopolies of the centers. The thesis (developed by the Chinese revolutionaries, among others) that only socialism can solve the problems of these societies remains true. True, that is, if by socialism we mean not a formula that is completely worked out and supposedly definitive, but a movement articulating the solidarity of all, carried out in accordance with people’s strategies that ensure the gradual, organised transfer, by civilised means of the vast reserves into the modern enclaves. That requires delinking understood as the subordination of external relations to the logic of this popular, national stage of the long transition.

I should add that the notion of “competitiveness” is misused in the dominant discourse. There it is reduced to a micro-economic concept (the myopic view of the director of an enterprise), whereas it is the productive systems (which are historically national) whose efficiency as a whole gives their component enterprises the competitive capacity in question.

On the basis of the observations and reflections set forth here, it can be seen that the world outside the central Triad is made up of three levels of peripheries.

- First level : the former socialist countries, China, Korea, Taiwan, India, Brazil and Mexico, which have succeeded in building national productive systems (and which are therefore potentially, if not actually, “competitive”).
- Second level : the countries that have embarked on industrialisation but have not succeeded in creating national productives systems : the Arab countries, South Africa, Iran, Turkey, Latin America. In these countries there are occasionally found “competitive” industrial establishments (thanks in particular to their cheap labour), but no competitive systems.
- Third level : the countries that have not entered into the industrial revolution (roughly speaking, the ACPs). These are potentially “competitive” only in domains where natural advantages are the controlling factor : mines, oil, tropical agricultural products.

In none of the countries of the first two levels has it been possible to absorb the “passive” reserves, which vary from 40 % (in Russia) to 80 % (in India and China). In Africa the proportion is plainly close to or greater than 90 %. Under these conditions, to talk about a strategic objective of becoming “competitive” is to delight in meaningless words.

The renewed monopolies of the imperialist centers

The position of a country in the world pyramid is defined by the level of competitiveness of its products on the world market. Recognising this truism in no way implies that one shares the commonplace view of popular economics that this position is achieved by the application of “rational” economic policies whose rationality is, precisely, measured by the yardstick of its obedience to the alleged “objective laws of the market”. I suggest that, absolutely to the contrary of this nonsense that is taken for granted, the “competitiveness” in question is the complex product of a cluster of conditions operating in the whole field of reality – economic, political and social. In that frame asymmetric relations between centers and peripheries’ have been constructed on the basis of “monopolies” operating to the benefit of the centers. These “monopolies” are specific to each of the successive phases of the imperialist system.

During one and a half century from the industrial revolution (early 19th century) to the end of the cycle of expansion which followed world war II (around 1970-1980) the monopoly of the centers was that of industry. Centers and peripheries were quasi synonymous to industrialised versus non industrialised countries. A specific pattern of the globalised law of value (which I distinguish from the law of value in general), the components of which being identified in that context, managed the reproduction of the system as a whole.

One understands therefore that the national liberation movements in the peripheries gave a top priority to industrialising their respective countries, with a view to “catching up”. They did succeed – to various degrees – and thus compelled imperialism to adjust, putting an end to that stage of its deployment.

That page being now turned does not mean that the peripheries were indeed on the road to “catching up”, as the ideology of development suggested. The centers did reorganise themselves around “new monopolies” in order to face the industrialisation of the peripheries.

To day in this unequal combat the centers take advantage of what I call their “five new monopolies”, articulating the action of all for maximum effect. These five monopolies therefore challenge social theory in its totality. In my opinion, they are as follows:

(1) The monopoly in various areas of technology, which demands gigantic expenditures that only the state – the big, rich State – can conceive of sustaining. Without this support, which is never mentioned in liberal discourse, and especially the support of military spending, the monopoly in most of these areas could not be maintained.

(2) The monopoly of the control of global financial flows. The liberalisation of the establishment of major financial institutions operating on the world financial market has given this monopoly an unprecedented effectiveness. Not so long ago the major portion of the saving of a nation could circulate only in the space – generally national – governed by its financial institutions. Today this is no longer the case : savings are centralized by the intervention of financial institutions whose field of operation is now the whole world. They constitute financial capital, the most globalized segment of capital. Nevertheless, this privilege is based on a political logic that ensures the acceptance of financial globalisation. This logic could be challenged by a simple political decision to delinking, even if it were limited to the domain of financial transfers. Moreover, the free movement of globalized financial capital takes place within a framework defined by a world monetary system. That system is based on the dogma of the free appreciation of the value of currencies by the market (in accordance with a theory holding that money is a commodity like any other) and on reference to the dollar as the de facto universal currency. The first of these conditions is without scientific basis, and the second functions only because there is no alternative. The national currency of a particular country can satisfactorily fulfil the function of an international currency only if the conditions of international competition produce a structural surplus of exports from that country, ensuring that it will finance the structural adjustment of the others. In the XIXth century, that was the case of Great Britain. It is not the case today of the United States, which, on the contrary, finances its deficit by the loans it forces on others. Nor is it the case of the rivals of the United States, Germany's surpluses having disappeared after unification, and Japan's being utterly inadequate to the financial needs of the structural adjustment of others. In these conditions financial globalisation, far from being a "natural" development is, on the contrary, extremely fragile. In the short run it engenders only a permanent instability, and not the stability necessary for the process of adjustment to operate efficiently.

(3) The monopoly of access to the natural resources of the planet. The dangers that the mindless exploitation of these resources poses henceforth for the planet – dangers that capitalism, which is based on nothing more than a short-term social rationality, cannot overcome – reinforces the significance of the monopoly of the already developed countries, whose only concern is to prevent others from adopting their own wasteful practices.

(4) The monopoly in the field of communication and the media, which not only homogenize at the lowest level the world culture that they transmit but also open up new means of political manipulation. The expansion of the market of the modern media is already one of the major factors in the erosion of the concept and practice of democracy in the West itself.

(5) Finally, the monopoly of weapons of mass destruction. This monopoly which was limited in the post war period by the bipolar structure of world power, has again become the absolute weapon that American diplomacy reserves for its sole use, as in 1945. Although "proliferation" entails the obvious danger of spinning out of control in some unforeseen way, in the absence of democratic world control of a truly global disarmament, there is no other means by which this unacceptable monopoly can be combated.

Taken together, these five monopolies define the framework within which the globalized law of the value expresses itself. Far from being the expression of a “pure” economic rationality, which can be separated from its social and political setting, the law of value is the condensed expression of all these conditioning factors. I maintain that these factors cancel out the significance of the industrialisation of the peripheries, devaluing the productive labour incorporated in its products while overvaluing the alleged added value attached to the activities through which the new monopolies operate to the benefit of the centers. They therefore produce a new hierarchy in the distribution of income on a world scale, which is more unequal than ever, subordinate the industries of the peripheries, and reduce them to the status of subcontractors. This gives polarisation a new foundation that will determine its forms in future.

GEOSTRATEGY OF CONTEMPORARY IMPERIALISM

1. From permanent conflict of imperialisms to collective imperialism

In its globalised deployment, imperialism was always conjugated in plural, since its inception (in the XVIth century) until 1945. The conflict of imperialisms, permanent and, often violent, too has occupied in fact a decisive place in the transformation of the world as class struggle, through which fundamental contradictions of capitalism are expressed. Moreover, social fights and conflicts of the imperialisms are closely articulated and it is this articulation that determines the course of really existing capitalism. I also point out that the analysis that I have proposed in this respect differs vastly from that of the "succession of hegemonies".

The Second World War ended in a major transformation with regard to the forms of imperialism: the substitution of the multiplicity of imperialisms in permanent conflict by collective imperialism combining the ensemble of the centres of the world capitalist system (simply, the "triad": the United States and its external Canadian province, Western and central Europe, Japan). This new form of imperialist expansion went through various phases of its development, but it remained all the time present. The eventual hegemonic role of the United States, whose bases will have to be specified as the forms of its articulation with the new collective imperialism, must be located within this perspective. These questions pose problems, which are precisely those that I would wish to point out here.

The United States drew a gigantic benefit from the Second World War, which had ruined its principal combatants - Europe, Soviet Union, China and Japan. It was thus in a position to exert its economic hegemony, since it concentrated more than half of the global industrial production and had specialty in the new technologies that would shape the development of the second half of the century. In addition, they possessed a specialty in the nuclear weapon - the new "absolute" weapon. This is why I situate the break announcing the end of war not at Yalta as what is often told (at Yalta the United States did not have the weapon yet) but at Potsdam (a few days before the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). At Potsdam the American tone changed: the decision to engage what was going to be the "cold war" was made by them.

This double absolute advantage was nevertheless eroded in a relatively short period of time (within two decades), by double recovery, economic for the capitalist Europe and Japan,

military for the Soviet Union. It will be remembered that this relative retreat of the US power provided at the time a flowering of the discourse on "American decline", and even an ascent of alternative hegemonies (Europe, Japan, later China...).

Does this new collective imperialism thus stir a "definitive" (non-conjunctural) qualitative transformation? Does it inevitably imply a "leadership" of the United States in one way or another?

2. The project of the ruling class of the United States: to extend the Monroe doctrine to the whole Planet

This project, which I will describe without much hesitation as overweening, even crazy, and criminal by what it implies, did not come out of President Bush Junior's head, to be implemented by an extreme right junta, seizing power through dubious elections.

It is the project which the ruling class of the United States unceasingly nurtured since 1945, even though its implementation evidently passed through ups and downs, encountered a few vicissitudes and was here and there put to check, and could not be pursued with consistency and violence that this implied in certain conjunctural moments like ours, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The project always rendered a decisive role to its military dimension. It was conceived after Potsdam, as I pointed out, founded on nuclear monopoly. Very quickly, the United States conceived a global military strategy, dividing the planet into regions and allocating the responsibility for the control of each of them under a "US Military Command". I refer to what I wrote on this subject even before the collapse of the USSR, and on the priority position occupied by the Middle East in this global strategic vision. (4) The objective was not only "to encircle the USSR" (and China), but as well to draw up means making Washington the ruler in the last resort of all the regions of the planet. In other words, it extended the Monroe Doctrine to the whole planet, which effectively gave the exclusive right of managing the ensemble of the New World to the United States in accordance to what it defined as its "national interests".

The preferred instrument of the hegemonist offensive is therefore the military. US hegemony, which in turn guarantees the hegemony of the Triad over the world system, therefore demands that its allies agree to follow in the American wake, like Great Britain, and Japan, acknowledging the necessity of doing so, and acknowledging it without any emotional crises or any hand-wringing over "culture". But that means that all the speeches that the European politicians feed their audiences about the economic power of Europe have no real significance. By placing itself solely on the terrain of mercantile disputes, with no project of its own, Europe is beaten in advance. Washington knows that very well.

The project implies that the "sovereignty of the national interests of the United States" is placed above all the other principles controlling the political behaviours that we regard as "legitimate" means; it develops a systematic mistrust towards all supranational rights. The ruling class of the United States proclaims openly that it "will not tolerate" the reconstitution of any economic and military power capable of questioning its monopoly of domination over

the planet, and for this purpose, it gave itself the right to lead "preventive wars". Three principal potential adversaries are targeted here.

In the first place is Russia, whose dismemberment, after that of the USSR, constitutes henceforth a major strategic objective of the United States. The Russian ruling class does not appear to have understood this till now. It seems convinced that after having "lost the war", it could "win peace", as what had been for Germany and Japan. It forgets that Washington needed the recovery of these two adversaries in the Second World War, precisely to face the Soviet challenge. The new conjuncture is different, the United States not having more serious competitor. Their option is then to permanently and completely destroy the ravaged Russian adversary. Will Putin understand this and initiate Russia in coming out of its illusions?

In the second place China, whose expanse and economic success worry the United States, whose strategic objective remains here too to dismember this large country.

Europe comes in the third place in this global vision of the new masters of the world. But here the North-American establishment does not appear anxious, at least so far. The unconditional Atlanticism of a few (Great Britain, as well as the new servile powers of the East), the "quicksand of the European project" (the point on which I will come back), the converging interests of the dominant capital of the collective imperialism of the triad, contribute in the effacement of the European project, maintained in its status of "European wing of the US project". The diplomacy of Washington has managed to keep Germany on its trail, the reunification and the conquest of Eastern Europe even seemed to reinforce this alliance: Germany would be encouraged to reclaim its tradition of "thrust towards the East" (the part played by Berlin in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia by the hasty recognition of the Slovenian and Croatian independence was its expression (8)) and, as for the rest, induced to navigate on Washington's trail. Is there a reversing of steam in progress? The German political class appears hesitant and could be divided as far as its strategic choices are concerned. The alternative to the Atlanticist alignment - which seems to have wind in its sails - calls, in counterpoint, a reinforcement of Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis, which would then become the most solid pillar of a European system independent of Washington.

3. The economic and political management of the new imperialist system under US leadership

The instruments for that management were created after world war II and eventually reformulated with a view to meet new challenges.

The main of these instruments are, with respect to the economic dimension of the management of the system, WTO, World Bank and IMF while, with respect to its political and military management, these are G7/8 and NATO.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) was established precisely to strengthen these "advantages" of transnational capital and establish their legitimacy for the ruling of the global economy. The so called "rights of industrial and intellectual property" are conceived with a view to perpetuating the monopoly of transnationals, guarantee their super profits and create additional enormous obstacles for further autonomous industrial development in the peripheries. Similarly the offensive of WTO aiming at integrating agriculture in the global deregulated open market will simply destroy any attempt of countries of the South to ensure

food security, and furthers throw into poverty hundreds of millions of peasants in the South. The logics which commands these policies of systematic overprotection of northern monopolies denies the validity of the dominant discourse with respect to the advantages of the so called “free trade, free access to markets”. These policies contradict brutally that discourse, which is therefore nothing but simply “propaganda”, i.e. lie. That logics is clearly formulated in the strategy of WTO aiming at developing an “international business law” which is given priority over any national legislation. The scandalous project of a “Multinational Agreement on Investment”, prepared in secret by OECD countries, is part of that plan.

Other institutions of the global system also play some role in that frame, while only supportive of G7 overall strategies. That is the case for instance of the World Bank. This institution, often pompously presented as the major “think tank” formulating strategic choices for the global economy, is certainly not that important. World Bank is hardly more than a kind of Ministry of Propaganda for the G7 in charge of producing slogans and discourses, while actual responsibility for making economic strategic decisions is reserved to WTO and for political decisions to NATO. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is more important, albeit not as much as is being usually said. As long as the principle of flexible exchange rates govern the international monetary system and as long as IMF is not accountable for the relations between major currencies (dollar, mark-euro, yen), the Fund operates only as a kind of supreme currency authority for the south, governed by the North.

These institutions – and particularly G7 and NATO – are there to replace the UN family, which is invited to submit, or will be marginalised and perhaps even dismantled.

4. Collective Imperialism of the triad and hegemonies of the United States: their articulation and their contradictions

Today’s world is militarily unipolar. At the same time, some fissures seem to become apparent between the United States and some of the European countries with regard to the political management of a global system so far united on the principles of liberalism, in theory at least. Are these fissures only conjunctural and of limited range, or do they proclaim some lasting changes? Thus, it will be necessary to analyse in all their complexity the logics that command the deployment of the new phase of collective imperialism (North-South relationships in the current language) and the specific objectives of the US project. In this spirit I will approach succinctly and successively five series of questions.

- *Concerning the nature of evolutions which have led to the constitution of the new collective imperialism*

I suggest here that the formation of the new collective imperialism finds its origin in the transformation of the conditions of competition. Only a few decades ago, the large firms fought their competing battles essentially over the national markets, whether it is the matter of the United States’ (the largest national market in the world) or even those of the European States (in spite of their modest size, which handicapped them in relation to the United States). The winners of the national “matches” could perform well on the world market. Today, the size of the market necessary for gaining an upper hand in the first cycle of matches approaches some 500-600 million “potential consumers”. The battle must thus be launched straightaway on the global market and won on this ground. And those who perform over this

market assert then more over their respective national terrains. Thorough internationalisation becomes the primary setting of the activity of the large firms. In other words, in the pair national/global, the terms of causality are reversed: earlier the national power commanded the global presence and today it is the reverse. Therefore the transnational firms, whatever is their nationality, have common interests in the management of the world market. These interests are superimposed on the permanent and mercantile conflicts, which define all the forms of competition specific to capitalism, irrespective of what they are.

The solidarity of the dominant segments of the transnationalized capital of all the partners in the triad is real, and is expressed by their rallying to globalized neo-liberalism. The United States is seen from this perspective as the defender (military if necessary) of these "common interests". Nonetheless, Washington does not intend "to equitably share" the profits of its leadership. The United States seeks, on the contrary, to reduce its allies into vassals and, thus is only ready to make minor concessions to junior allies in the Triad. Will this conflict of interests within dominant capital lead to the break-up of the Atlantic alliance? Not impossible, but unlikely.

• *Concerning the place of the United States in the world economy*

General opinion has it that US military power only constitutes the tip of the iceberg, extending the country's superiority in all areas, notably economic, but even political and cultural. Therefore, submission to the hegemony that it pretends would be impossible to circumvent.

I maintain, in counterpoint that, in the system of collective imperialism the United States does not have decisive economic advantages; the US production system is far from being "the most efficient in the world". On the contrary, almost none of its sectors would be certain of beating competitors in the truly free market dreamt of by liberal economists. The US trade deficit, which increases year by year, went from 100 billion dollars in 1989 to 500 billion in 2002. Moreover, this deficit involved practically all areas of production system. Even the surplus once enjoyed by the US in the area of high-technology goods, which stood at 35 billion in 1990, has now turned into a deficit. Competition between Ariane rockets and those of NASA, between Airbus and Boeing, testifies to the vulnerability of the American advantages. Faced by European and Japanese competition in high-technology products, by Chinese, Korean and other Asian and Latin American industrialised countries in competition for banal manufactured products, by Europe and the southern cone of Latin America in agriculture, the United States probably would not be able to win were it not for the recourse to "extra-economic" means, violating the principles of liberalism imposed on its competitors!

In fact, the US only benefits from comparative advantages in the armaments sector, precisely because this sector largely operates outside the rules of the market and benefits from state support. This advantage probably brings certain benefits for the civil sphere in its wake (the Internet being the best-known example), but it also causes serious distortions that handicap many production sectors.

The North American economy lives parasitically to the detriment of its partners in the world system. "The United States depends for 10 per cent of its industrial consumption on goods whose import costs are not covered by the exports of its own products", as Emmanuel Todd recalls (9). The world produces, and the United States (which has practically no national

saving) consumes. The "advantage" of the US is that of a predator whose deficit is covered by loans from others, whether consenting or forced. The means put in place by Washington to compensate for deficiencies are of various kinds: repeated unilateral violations of liberal principles, arms exports, search for greater profits from oil (which presupposes systematic control over the producers – one of the real reasons for the wars in Central Asia and Iraq). The fact is that the essential part of the American deficit is covered by contributions of capital from Europe, Japan and the South (from oil-rich countries and comprador classes of every country of the Third World, the poorest included), to which are added the additional sums brought in from servicing the debt that has been forced on almost all the countries on the periphery of the world system.

The growth of the Clinton years, vaunted as the result of a "liberalism" that Europe was unfortunately resisting, was in fact largely fake, and in any case, non-generalisable, depending on capital transfers that meant the stagnation of partner economies. For all sectors of the real production system, US growth was not better than that of Europe. The "American miracle" was fed exclusively by a growth in expenditure produced by growing social inequalities (financial and personal services: the legions of lawyers and private police forces, etc). In this sense, Clinton's liberalism indeed prepared the conditions for the reactionary wave, and later victory of Bush Junior.

The causes of the weakening of the US production system are complex. They are certainly not conjunctural, and they cannot be corrected by the adoption of a correct rate of exchange, for example, or by putting in place a more favourable balance between salaries and productivity. They are structural. The mediocrity of general education and training systems, and a deep-rooted prejudice systematically in favour of the "private" to the detriment of the public service, is one of the main reasons for the profound crisis that the US society is going through.

One should, therefore, be surprised that the Europeans, far from drawing the conclusions that observation of the deficiencies of the US economy forces upon one, are actively going about imitating it. Here, too, the liberal virus does not explain everything, even if it fulfils some useful functions for the system in paralysing the left. Widespread privatisation and the dismantling of public services will only reduce the comparative advantages that "Old Europe" (as Bush qualifies it) still benefits from. However, whatever damage these things will cause in the long term, such measures offer dominant capital, which lives in the short term, the chance of making additional profits.

• *Concerning the specific objectives of the project of the United States*

The hegemonic strategy of the United States is within the framework of the new collective Imperialism. The target is simply to establish the military control of the US forces over the Planet. This would guarantee to Washington a privileged special access to all the natural resources of the Earth, and through it would subordinate the allies and submit Russia, China and the Third world to the status of dependent states.

The "(conventional) economists" do not have the analytical tools enabling them to understand the paramount importance of these objectives. They are heard repeating ad nauseam that in the "new economy" the raw materials coming from the third world are destined to lose their importance and thus it is becoming more and more marginal in the world system. In

counterpoint to this naïve and hollow discourse, the *Mein Kampf* of the new administration of Washington (The programme for a New American Century), it is acknowledged that the United States works hard for the right to seize all the natural resources of the planet to meet in priority its consumption requirements. The race for raw materials (oil in the first place, but as much for other resources too – water in particular) has already recovered all its virulence. All the more since these resources are likely to become scarce not only by the exponential cancer of the wastage of Western consumption, but also by the development of the new industrialization of the peripheries.

Moreover, a respectable number of countries from the South are destined to become increasingly important industrial producers as much for their internal markets as in the world market. As importers of technologies, of capital, also competitors in exports, they are destined to push down the global economic equilibrium with an increasing weight. And it is not a question only of some East Asian countries (like Korea), but of immense China and, tomorrow, India and the large countries of Latin America. However, far from being a factor of stabilization, the acceleration of capitalist expansion in the South can only be the cause of violent conflicts, internal and international. Because this expansion cannot absorb, under the conditions of the periphery, the enormous reserve of labour force, which is concentrated there. In fact the peripheries of the system remain the "zone of tempests". The centres of the capitalist system thus require exerting their domination over the peripheries, to subject their people to the pitiless discipline that the satisfaction of its priorities requires.

Within this perspective, the American establishment has perfectly understood that, in the pursuit of its hegemony, it has three decisive advantages over its European and Japanese competitors: the control over the natural resources of the globe, the military monopoly, the weight of the "Anglo-Saxon culture" by which the ideological domination of capitalism is expressed preferentially. A systematic bringing into play of these three advantages clarifies many aspects of the US policy, in particular the systematic efforts that Washington exerts for the military control of the oil-producing Middle East, its offensive strategy with regard to Korea – taking advantage of this country's "financial crisis" – and to China, its subtle game aiming at perpetuating divisions in Europe – while mobilizing to this end its unconditional British ally - and at preventing any serious rapprochement between the European Union and Russia. At the level of the global control over the resources of the planet, the United States has a decisive advantage over Europe and Japan. Not only because the United States is the sole international military power, and thus no strong intervention in the Third World can be led without it. But more because Europe (excluding ex-USSR) and Japan are, themselves, divested of essential resources steadily from their economy. For example, their dependence in the energy sector, in particular their oil dependence with regard to the Gulf, is and will remain for a considerable long time, even if it were to decrease in relative terms. By militarily seizing the control of this region through Iraq war the US has demonstrated that they were perfectly conscious of the utility of this pressure medium, which it brings to bear on its allied-competitors. Not long ago the Soviet power had also understood this vulnerability of Europe and Japan; and certain Soviet interventions in the Third World had had as an aim of reminding it to them, so as to induce them to negotiate on other grounds. Evidently the deficiencies of Europe and Japan could be compensated in the event of a serious Europe-Russia rapprochement ("the common home" of Gorbachev). It is the very reason for which the danger of this construction of Eurasia becomes Washington's nightmare.

The military control of the Planet is – in last resort – the means for the USA to pump a tribute to its benefit through the use of political violence. This pumping should replace the “spontaneous” flow of capital which compensates the US deficit – the main reason for the vulnerability of the US hegemony. The target is therefore not to “open the markets on equal basis for all” (that rhetoric is left to the neo-liberal propagandists). Neither is it of course to promote democracy!

• *Concerning the conflicts that place the United States and its partners in the Triad opposite each other within this framework*

If the partners in the Triad share common interests in the global management of collective imperialism implied in their relationship with the South, they are certainly not less in a serious potential conflictual relationship.

The American superpower sustains itself due to the capital flow that feeds the parasitism of its economy and society. The vulnerability of the United States constitutes, therefore, a serious threat for the project of Washington.

Europe in particular, and the rest of the world in general, will have to choose one of the following two strategic options: to invest the "surplus" of their capital ("of saving") from which they arrange for financing the US deficit (consumption, investments and military expenditures); or conserve and invest this surplus at home.

The conventional economists are ignorant of the problem, having made the hypothesis (which is not anything, but a nonsense) that “globalisation” having abolished the nations, the economic grandeurs (saving and investment) cannot be managed any more "at national levels". It is a matter of a tautological reasoning where the conclusions at which one wishes to arrive are implied in the very premises: to justify and accept the financing of the US deficit by others since, at the world level, one finds indeed the saving-investment identity!

Why thus such ineptitude is accepted? No doubt, the teams "of scholarly economists" who encircle the European (and also, Russian and Chinese) political classes of the right as well as of the electoral left are themselves victims of their economic alienation, which I term as the "liberal virus". Besides, through this option in fact the political judgment of the large transnational capital is expressed which considers that the advantages got by the management of the globalised system by the United States on behalf of collective imperialism prevail over its disadvantages: the tribute which is needed to pay Washington for ensuring permanence. Because it was a tribute after all and not an “investment” with a good guaranteed return. There are some countries qualified as “poor indebted countries" which are always constrained to ensure the servicing of their debt at any price. But there is also a "powerful indebted country" which has the means enabling it to devalue its debt if it considers necessary.

The other option for Europe (and the rest of the world) would thus consist in putting an end to the transfusion in favour of the United States. The surplus could then be used on the original spot (in Europe) and the economy be revived. Because the transfusion requires a submission of Europeans to "deflationary" policies (improper term of the language of conventional economics) that I call as "stagnationist" – so as to release a surplus of exportable saving. It

makes a recovery in Europe – always mediocre – dependent on an artificial support from that of the United States. The mobilization of this surplus in opposite direction for local employment in Europe would permit the simultaneous revival of consumption (by rebuilding the social dimension of the economic management devastated by the liberal virus), investment - and particularly in new technologies (and financing their research), even military expenditure (putting an end to the "advantages" of the United States in this field). The option in favour of this challenging response implies a rebalancing of the social relationships in favour of the labouring classes. National conflicts and social struggles are articulated in this way. In other words, the contrast between the United States and Europe does not fundamentally oppose the interests of dominant segments of the capital of various partners.

The neo-liberal option of Europe, reinforced by a so called “apolitical” management of its currency (the Euro), does not help the continent moving out of stagnation. It is an absurd choice, perfectly convenient for Washington which manages its currency (the dollar) differently, with political sense ! Along with an eventual exclusive control of the US over oil this management permits to what I call the “oil-dollar standard” to be the only international currency in last resort, while the Euro remains a subaltern regional currency.

The political conflict which may develop between Europe (or some of the major European states) and the USA is not the product of major divergences between dominant capital. I locate this conflict elsewhere, in the domain of what could be called “national interests” and/or in the inheritance of different political cultures, which I discussed at length elsewhere.

• *Concerning the questions of theory that the preceding reflections suggest*

Complicity-competition between the partners in collective imperialism for the control over the South – the plundering of its natural resources and submission of its people – can be analysed from different angles of vision. I will make, in this respect, three observations, which appear major to me.

First observation: the contemporary world system that I describe as collective imperialist is not "less" imperialist than its precedents. It is not an "Empire" of “post-capitalist” nature. I have proposed elsewhere a criticism of ideological formulations of the "disguise" that feeds this fashionable dominant discourse.

I am referring here to the so called “post modernist” theses which invite to renounce to any attempt to act and “change the world”, to the benefit of a day to day adjustment to those changes produced by the deployment of capitalism. Hardt and Negri aligned on that thesis – which is the permanent discourse of American liberalism since ever – in a perspective – naïve in the best of the hypotheses – that the world will change to the better by its own logics.

Second observation: I have proposed a reading of the history of capitalism, globalised right from its origin, centred on the distinction between the various phases of imperialism (of centres/peripheries relationships). There exist of course other readings of this same history, in particular that which is articulated around the "succession of hegemonies".

I have some reservations with regard to this last reading.

Primarily and essentially because it is "western-centric" in the sense that it considers that the transformations operating at the heart of the system, in its centres, command the global evolution of the system in a decisive, and almost exclusive, manner. I believe that the reactions of the people of the peripheries to the imperialist deployment should not be underestimated. For they are provoked, it would only be the independence of Americas, the great revolutions made in the name of socialism (Russia, China), the re-conquest of independence by the Asian and African countries, and I do not believe that one can account for the history of world capitalism without accounting for the "adjustments" that these transformations imposed even on central capitalism itself.

Then because the history of imperialism appears to me having been made more through the conflict of imperialisms than by the type "of order" that successive hegemonies have imposed. The apparent periods "of hegemony" have been always extremely short and the said hegemony very relative.

Third observation: internationalisation is not synonymous with "unification" of economic system by "the de-regulated opening up of the markets". The latter – in its successive historical forms ("the freedom of trade" yesterday, the "freedom of firms" today) – always constituted the project of the dominant capital only. In reality this project was almost always forced to adjust with exigencies that are not the concern of its exclusive and specific internal logic. It thus could never be implemented except in some short moments of the history. The "free exchange" promoted by the major industrial power of its time – Great Britain – was effective only during two decades (1860-1880) which was succeeded by a century (1880-1980) characterized at the same time by the conflict between the imperialists and by the strong de-linking of the countries known as socialist (starting from the Russian revolution of 1917, then that of China) and more modestly the populist nationalist countries (the era of Bandung for Asia and Africa from 1955 to 1975).). The current moment of reunification of the world market (the "free enterprise") inaugurated by neo-liberalism since 1980, extended to the whole planet with the Soviet collapse, probably is not destined to experience a better fate. The chaos which it generates - term by which I have described this system since 1990 - testifies to its character "of permanent utopia of capital".

5 Quicksand of the European project

All the governments of the European States until now are won over to the theses of liberalism. This lining up thus does not mean anything less than the obliteration of the European project, its double dilution, economic (the advantages of the European economic union are dissolved in economic globalisation) and political (European political and military autonomy disappears). There is not, at the present time, any European project. A North-Atlantic project (or eventually of the Triad) under the American command has substituted it.

The "made in USA" wars have certainly stirred the public opinions - everywhere in Europe against the latest, that of Iraq - and even certain governments, initially that of France, but then those of Germany, Russia and beyond that, of China, too. The fact remains that these same governments have not called into question their faithful alignment over the needs of liberalism. This major contradiction will have to be overcome in one way or another, either by their submission to the requirements of Washington, or by a true rupture putting an end to Atlanticism.

The major political conclusion that I draw from this analysis is that Europe cannot leave Atlanticism as long as political alliances defining the blocs in power rest centred over the dominant transnational capital. It is only if the social and political struggles manage to modify the content of these blocs and to impose new historical compromises between capital and labour that then Europe will be able to distance itself from Washington, allowing the revival of an eventual European project. Under these conditions Europe also could - even ought to - be engaged at the international level, in its relationships with the East and the South, on a path other than that traced by the exclusive requirements of collective imperialism, thus initiating its participation in the long march "beyond capitalism". In other words, Europe will be of left (the term left being taken here seriously) or will not be at all.

To reconcile the adherence to liberalism and the assertion of a political autonomy of Europe or the States constituting it remains the objective of certain fractions of European political classes anxious to preserve the exclusive positions of the large capital? Will they be able to manage that? I strongly doubt it.

On the other hand, will the popular classes in Europe, somewhere at least, be able to overcome the crisis that they confront? I believe it possible, precisely for the reasons signifying that the political culture of certain European countries at least, different from that of the United States, could produce this rebirth of the left. The obvious precondition is that it releases itself from the virus of liberalism.

The "European project" was born as the European wing of the Atlanticist project of the United States, conceived just after the Second World War, implemented by Washington in the spirit of the "cold war", the project to which the European bourgeoisies - both weakened and apprehensive with regard to their own working classes - practically adhered unconditionally.

However the deployment of this project itself - of doubtful origin - gradually modified some important facts about the problem and the challenges. Western Europe managed, or has the means, "to make up for" its economic and technological backwardness vis-à-vis the United States. In addition, "the Soviet threat" is not there any more. Moreover, the project's deployment erased the principal and violent adversities that had marked the European history during a past century and half: the three major countries of the continent - France, Germany and Russia - are reconciled. All these evolutions are, in my opinion, positive and rich with still more potential. Certainly this deployment is inscribed over the economic bases inspired by the principles of liberalism, but of a liberalism which was tempered until the 1980s by the social dimension taken into account by and through the "social-democratic historical compromise" forcing the capital to adjust itself to the demands of social justice expressed by the working classes. Afterwards, the deployment continued in a new social framework inspired by "American-style", anti-social liberalism.

This last turn has plunged the European societies in a multi-dimensional crisis. Essentially, it is the economic crisis nothing more and nothing less, immanent in the liberal choice. A crisis was aggravated by the alignment of the European countries over the economic requirements of the North American leadership, Europe consenting until now to finance the latter's deficit with the detriment of its own interests. Then there is a social crisis, which is accentuated by the rise of resistances and the struggles of the popular classes against the fatal consequences

of the liberal option. Lastly, there is the beginning of a political crisis - the refusal to align, at least unconditionally, over the US' choice: the endless war against the South.

How will the European people and states face this triple challenge?

The Europeanists are divided into fairly three different groups:

- Those who defend the liberal choice and accept the US leadership, almost unconditionally
- Those who defend the liberal choice but would wish an independent political Europe, outside the American alignment.
- Those who would wish (and fight for) "social Europe" i.e. a capitalism tempered by a new social compromise between capital and labour operating on an European scale, and simultaneously, a political Europe practising "other relations" (implying friendly, democratic and peaceful) with the South, Russia and China. The general public opinion throughout Europe has expressed, during the European Social Forum (Florence 2002, Paris 2003), as well as at the time of the Iraq war, its sympathy for this position on principles.

There are certainly others, the "non Europeans", in the sense that they do not think any of the three pro-European options possible or even desirable. They are still at the moment minorities but certainly called to strengthen themselves. They need to strengthen upon one of the two fundamentally different options:

- A "populist" option of right, refusing the progress of political powers - and including economic- supranationals, except obviously for those of the transnational capital! –
- A popular option of left, national, citizen, democratic and social.

On what forces is based each one of these tendencies and what are their respective chances?

The dominant capital is liberal, by nature. In fact it is logically inclined towards supporting the first of the three options. Tony Blair represents the most coherent expression of what I have qualified as "the collective imperialism of the triad". The political class reunited behind the star-studded banner is disposed, if necessary, "to sacrifice the European project" – or at least to dissipate any illusion about it – by maintaining it in the original shackles: to be the European section of the Atlanticist project. But Bush, like Hitler, does not conceive allies other than unconditional aligned subordinates. This is why important segments of the political class, including the right – and although in principle being the defenders of the interests of dominant capital – refuse to line up with the United States as yesterday they did with Hitler. If there were a possible Churchill in Europe it would be Chirac. Will he be so?

The strategy of the dominant capital can be accommodated in an "anti-Europeanism of right", which would be satisfied with demagogic nationalist rhetoric (mobilising, for example, on the theme of the immigrants, of course) while being subjected in fact to the requirements of a not specifically "European", rather globalised, liberalism. Aznar and Berlusconi constitute the prototypes of these allies of Washington. Likewise are the servile political classes of Eastern Europe.

In fact I believe the second option difficult to hold. It is however that the choice of the major European governments - France and Germany. Does it express the ambitions of a capital sufficiently powerful to be capable of emancipating itself from the US supervision? It is a

question to which I do not have an answer: perhaps possible, but intuitively I would say highly improbable.

This choice is nevertheless that of allies facing the North-American adversary constituting the principal enemy of the whole humanity. I say clearly allies because I am persuaded that, if they persist in their choice, they will be driven to leave the submission to the logic of the unilateral project of capital (liberalism) and to seek alliances on the left (the only ones which can give force to their project of independence vis-à-vis Washington). The alliance between two and three groups is not impossible. Just as the great anti-Nazi alliance.

If this alliance takes form, then shall it and will it be able to operate exclusively within the European framework, all the Europeanists being unable to renounce the priority given to this framework? I do not believe it, because this framework, such as it is and will remain, systematically favours only the pro-American first group's choice. Will it then be necessary to fracture Europe and renounce its project definitively?

I do not believe it either necessary, or even desirable. Another strategy is possible: that to leave the European project "fixed" a while at its present stage of development, and to parallelly develop other axes of alliances.

I would give here a very first priority to the construction of a political and strategic alliance between Paris, Berlin and Moscow stretched to Beijing and Delhi if possible. I say clearly political with the objective to restore to international pluralism and to the UNO all their functions; and strategic, in the sense of constructing military forces to the stature of the American challenge. These three or four powers have all the means, technological and financial, reinforced by their traditions of military capacities in front of which the United States is pallid. The American challenge and its criminal ambitions compel it. But these ambitions are disproportionate. It should be proven. To constitute an anti-hegemonist front has today the similar priority, as in the past it was to constitute an anti-Nazi alliance.

This strategy would reconcile the "pro-Europeans" of the second and third groups and the "non-Europeans" of left. It would thus create favourable conditions for the later revival of a European project, integrating even probably a Great Britain liberated from its submission before the United States and an Eastern Europe relieved of its servile culture. Let us be patient, this will take much time.

There will be no progress possible of any European project as long as the US strategy is not routed.

Conclusion: the Empire of chaos and the Permanent war

The project of the US domination – the extension of Monroe doctrines to the entire planet - is disproportionate. This project, that I qualified for this reason as the Empire of chaos since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, will be fatally confronted with the rise of growing resistance of the nations of the old world not ready to be subjected to it. The United States then will have to behave like a "Rogue State" par excellence, substituting the international law with a recourse to the permanent war (starting with the Middle-East, but aiming beyond that,

to Russia and Asia), slipping on the fascist slope (the "patriotic law" has already given powers to the police force, equal to those of Gestapo, with regard to foreigners – "aliens").