

THE COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH MUST TAKE THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT INITIATIVES

By SAMIR AMIN

For the second time in contemporary history the imperialist dimension of capitalism is being challenged.

The first time was after the second world war.

Since 1947, the United States of America, the dominating imperialist power of that epoch, proclaimed the division of the world into two spheres, that of the 'free world' and that of 'communist totalitarianism'. The reality of the Third World was flagrantly ignored: it was felt privileged to belong to the 'free world', as it was 'non-communist'. 'Freedom' was considered as applying only to capital, with complete disregard for the realities of colonial and semi-colonial oppression. The following year Jdanov, in his famous report (in fact, Stalin's), which led to the setting up of the Kominform (an attenuated form of the Third International), also divided the world into two, the socialist sphere (the USSR and Eastern Europe) and the capitalist one (the rest of the world). The report ignored the contradictions within the capitalist sphere which opposed the imperialist centres to the peoples and nations of the peripheries who were engaged in struggles for their liberation.

The Jdanov doctrine pursued one main aim: to impose peaceful coexistence and hence to calm the aggressive passions of the United States and their subaltern European and Japanese allies. In exchange, the Soviet Union would accept a low profile, abstaining from interfering in colonial matters that the imperialist powers considered their internal affairs. The liberation movements, including the Chinese revolution, were not supported with any enthusiasm at that time and they carried on by themselves. But their victory (particularly that of China, of course) was to bring about some changes in international power relationships. Moscow did not perceive this until after Bandung, which enabled it, through its support to the countries in conflict with imperialism, to break out of its isolation and become a major actor in world affairs. In a way, it is not wrong to say that the main change in the world system was the result of this first 'Awakening of the South'. Without this knowledge, the later affirmation of the new 'emerging' powers cannot be understood.

The Jdanov report was accepted without reservation by the European communist parties and of those of Latin America of that era. However, almost immediately it came up against resistance from the communist parties of Asia and the Middle East. This was concealed in the language of that period, for they continued to affirm "the unity of the socialist camp" behind the USSR, but as time went on resistance became more overt with the development of their struggles for regaining independence, particularly after the victory of the Chinese revolution in 1949. To my knowledge, no-one has ever written the history of the formulation of the alternative theory, which gave full rein to the independent initiatives of the countries of Asia and Africa, later to crystallize at Bandung in 1955 and then in the constitution of the Non Aligned Movement (from 1960 defined as Asian-African, plus Cuba). The details are buried in

the archives of some communist parties (those of China, India, Indonesia, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and perhaps a few others).

Nevertheless I can bear personal witness to what happened, having been lucky enough, since 1950, to participate in one of the groups of reflection that brought together the Egyptian, Iraqi and Iranian communists and some others. Information about the Chinese debate, inspired by Zhou Enlai was not made known to us by Comrade Wang (the link with the journal *Révolution*, whose editorial committee included myself) until much later, in 1963. We heard echoes of the Indian debate and the split that it had provoked, which was confirmed afterwards by the constitution of the CPM. We knew that debates within the Indonesian and Filipino communist parties developed along the same lines.

This history should be written as it will help people to understand that Bandung did not originate in the heads of the nationalist leaders (Nehru and Sukarno particularly, rather less, Nasser) as is implied by contemporary writers. It was the product of a radical leftwing critique which was at that time conducted within the communist parties. The common conclusion of these groups of reflection could be summed up in one sentence: the fight against imperialism brings together, at the world level, the social and political forces whose victories are decisive in opening up to possible socialist advances in the contemporary world.

This conclusion, however, left open a crucial question: who will 'direct' these anti-imperialist battles? To simplify: the bourgeoisie (then called 'national'), whom the communists should then support, or a front of popular classes, directed by the communists and not the bourgeoisies (who were anti-national, in fact)? The answer to this question often changed and was sometimes confused. In 1945 the communist parties concerned were aligned, based on the conclusion that Stalin had formulated: the bourgeoisies everywhere in the world (in Europe, aligned with the United States, as in the colonial and semi-colonial countries – in the language of that era) have "thrown the national flag into the rubbish bin" (Stalin's phrase) and the communists were therefore the only ones who could assemble a united front of the forces that refused to submit to the imperialist, capitalist American order. The same conclusion was reached by Mao in 1942, but only made known (to us) when his *New Democracy* had been translated into Western languages in 1952. This thesis held that for the majority of the peoples of the planet the long road to socialism could only be opened by a "national, popular, democratic, anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution [the language of the day], run by the communists." The underlying message was that other socialist advances were not on the agenda elsewhere, i.e., in the imperialist centres. They could not possibly take shape until after the peoples of the peripheries had inflicted substantial damage on imperialism.

The triumph of the Chinese revolution confirmed this conclusion. The communist parties of South East Asia, in Thailand, Malaysia and Philippines in particular, started liberation struggles inspired by the Vietnamese model. Later, in 1964, Che Guevara held similar views when he called for "one, two, three Vietnams."

The avant-garde proposals for initiatives by the independent and anti-imperialist 'countries of Asia and Africa', which were formulated by the different communist groups of reflection, were precise and advanced. They are to be found in the Bandung

programme and that of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which I gave a systematic presentation in my *L'éveil du Sud* (Awakening of the South). The proposals focussed on the essential need to reconquer control over the accumulation process (development which is auto-centred and delinked from the world economy).

It so happens that some of these proposals were adopted, although with considerable dilutions in certain countries, as from 1955 to 1960, by the governing classes as a whole in both continents. And at the same time the revolutionary struggles waged by all the communist parties of South East Asia were defeated (except in Vietnam, of course). The conclusion would seem to be that the 'national bourgeoisie' had not exhausted its capacity for anti-imperialist struggle. The Soviet Union also came to that conclusion when it decided to support the non-aligned front, while the imperialist Triad declared open warfare against it.

The communists in the countries concerned were then divided between the two tendencies and became involved in painful conflicts that were often confused. Some drew the lesson that it was necessary to 'support' the powers in place that were battling imperialism, although this support should remain 'critical'. Moscow gave wind to their sails by inventing the thesis of the 'non-capitalist way'. Others conserved the essentials of the Maoist thesis, according to which only a front of the popular classes that was independent of the bourgeoisie could lead a successful struggle against imperialism. The conflict between the Chinese communist party and the Soviet Union, which was apparent as from 1957 but officially declared as from 1960, of course confirmed the second tendency among the Asian and African communists.

However, the potential of the Bandung movement wore out within some fifteen years, emphasizing – if it should be needed – the limits of the anti-imperialist programmes of the 'national bourgeoisies'. Thus the conditions were ripe for the imperialist counter-offensive, the '*re-compradorisation*' of the Southern economies, if not – for the most vulnerable – their recolonization.

Nevertheless, as if to give the lie to this return imposed by the facts to the thesis of the definitive and absolute impotence of the national bourgeoisies – Bandung having been, according to this vision, just a 'passing episode' in the cold war context – certain countries of the South have been able to impose themselves as 'emerging' in the new globalization dominated by imperialism. But 'emerging' in what way? Emerging markets open to the expansion of capital of the oligopolies belonging to the imperialist Triad? Or emerging nations capable of imposing a genuine revision of the terms of globalization and reducing the power exercised by the oligopolies, while reconducting the accumulation to their own national development? The question of the social content of the powers in place in the emerging countries (and in the other countries of the periphery) and the prospects that this opens up or closes is once again on the agenda. It is a debate that cannot be avoided: what will – or could – be the 'post-crisis' world?

The crisis of the late imperialist capitalism of the generalized, financialized and globalized oligopolies is patent. But even before it passed into the new phase inaugurated by the financial collapse of 2008, people had begun to stir out of their

lethargy which had set in after the first wave of their struggles for the emancipation of the workers and people had worn itself out.

Latin America, which had been absent during the Bandung era (in spite of Cuba's efforts with the Tricontinental), this time seems to be even in advance of the rest of the movement.

There are of course many important new aspects in the present situation, but the same questions that were being posed in the 1950s are once again on the table. Will the South (emerging countries and others) be capable of taking independent strategic initiatives? Will popular forces be capable of imposing the transformations in the power systems that will be the only way of making serious progress? Can bridges be built that associate the anti-imperialist and popular struggles in the South with the progress of a socialist conscience in the North?

I will refrain from giving quick answers to these difficult questions that only the development of struggles will resolve. But the importance of these discussions in which the radical intellectuals of our era should commit themselves should not be underestimated, nor the proposals that may result from such discussions.

The conclusions reached by the groups of reflection of the 1950s formulated the challenge in terms that have remained essentially the same ever since: the peoples of the periphery must undertake national construction (supported by regional plans and those of the South as a whole), which are auto-centred and delinked; they cannot take this route unless their struggles are carried out in a socialist perspective; for this reason they must shed their illusions about the false alternative, that of 'catching up' in the globalized capitalist system. Bandung embodied this independent option but within the limits later to be revealed, as history unfolded.

Would the results be better now, when a second 'Awakening of the South' is on the horizon? Above all, will it be possible this time to build convergences between the struggles in the North and in the South? These were lamentably lacking in the Bandung epoch. The peoples of the imperialist centres then finally aligned behind their imperialist leaders. The social-democrat project of the time would in fact have been difficult to imagine without the imperialist rent that benefited the opulent societies of the North. Bandung and the Non Aligned Movement were thus seen as just an episode in the cold war, perhaps even manipulated by Moscow. In the North, there was little understanding of the real dimensions of this first emancipatory wave of the countries of Asia and Africa which, however, was convincing enough for Moscow to give it support.

The challenge of constructing an anti-imperialist internationalism of workers and peoples remains to be tackled.