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> "Europe does not exist : what there is just the European face of the North American project."

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> *Interview with Samir Amin by Giuliano Battiston (1)*

> *by Samir Amin*

> *and Giuliano Battiston*

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> On the eve of the event in Nairobi, Giuliano Battiston interviewed the president of the World Alternatives Forum, economist Samir Amin, for *Il Manifesto*. Among the matters covered, the incoherence of the European project. Representatives of the great social forces that are victims of capitalist policies participated from the first meetings out of which the Social Forum came about, which ended up calling itself "anti-Davos", small but decidedly symbolic.

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> Capitalism with a human face? Pure illusion. Moderate global alternatives? Ingenuous. Europe. Still to exist. Far from the circumspect rhetoric of the "politically correct", a tireless promoter of alternative politics and economics to those of the dominant neoliberal dogma, the Egyptian economist Samir Amin has made straight talking, analytic rigour and militant passion the tools of his deep-rooted battle to put people and their needs before profit. Samir Amin is an extremely prolific author, a convinced advocate of the need to join the claims of social justice and criticism of the inherent inequalities of capitalist globalization to a radicalization of political struggle capable of unifying the manifold energy of the alternative world movements. His writings are read and discussed by whoever seeks to convert the heterogeneity of the "movements" into a collective political actor, nor are they less read by those who fear their political effects.

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> G.B. According to a certain kind of Liberal and Conservative creed, the market will not just be the only tool of social regulation but also that the very promotion and universalization of rights will depend on the processes of economic globalization. How might one articulate the relationship between globalization in its current form and basic rights?

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> S.A. The argument of the dominant ideology - which absolutely equates democracy with the free market on the basis that it argues there is no democracy without a free market and that the free market itself creates the conditions that guarantee democracy - is a purely propagandist, populist discourse that has nothing to do with historical reality or with its scientific analysis. On the other hand, there is a quite basic contradiction in that dominant rhetoric which, reducing democracy to its merely political dimension, and that dimension only to representative democracy, dissociates it from social questions which are supposed to be capable of regulation by the workings of the free market, or to put it better, of an imaginary market. The theory of imaginary capitalism of conventional economists, for whom the generalized free market would tend to equilibrium, supposes that society is simply made up of the sum of the individuals who comprise it, without taking into account forms of social organization, belonging to the family, social class, nationality : forgetting, that is, what for Marx was a natural truth - taken up later especially by Karl Polanyi - and which is that economic values are embedded in social reality.

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> G.B. If a fundamental contradiction exists between a global market and basic rights, what tools could open a way enabling the contradiction to be overcome?

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> S.A. I have no recipes. But I suggest arguing from the perspective of launching strategies of struggle in common around some basic points, the first of which pivots on the idea that there cannot be authentic democracy without social progress. It is an objective that goes in exactly the opposite direction of the dominant discourse, which as has been seen, dissociates both terms and goes far beyond the thought of well-meaning social-liberals and social democrats who suppose the negative effects of capitalism can be mitigated by partial social regulation. Perhaps one should ditch the term "democracy" and talk rather of "democratization" understood as an endless process and remember that the need to associate social progress and democracy is an objective to be achieved in all the countries of the world. Democracy is also in crisis in countries that are called democratic precisely because, split off from the social question, it ends up reduced to representative democracy and the solution of social and economic problems gets transferred to the market. It is a very dangerous road, in Italy as elsewhere you have voted freely (or almost, since voting is very conditioned by the communications media) and nonetheless many wonder : why vote, if parliament affirms that some decisions have to be left to the market and to globalization? In that way democracy delegitimizes itself and runs the risk of turning into varieties of soft neo-fascism.

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- > G.B. According to your analysis, capitalism and globalization have always existed, but after World War 2 we have entered a new phase in which US strategy is to extend the Monroe doctrine to the whole planet. What do you think are the new phases of this globalization and what are the objectives prioritized in US strategy?
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- > S.A. At the root of this new phase lies a transformation of the nature of imperialism (I speak of imperialism and not "empire" like Toni Negri) : if up until the end of World War 2 imperialism was conjugated in the plural and the imperialist powers were in permanent conflict among themselves, since then we have witnessed a structural transformation which has given birth to a collective imperialism which I call the "triad", simplifying a little, the US, Europe and Japan, which is to say the collective of the dominant sector of capital who share common interests in the workings of the world system. This system, which represents a new form of imperialism against 85% of the world's population, "requires" war. This is precisely the point in which the project of the North American establishment comes into the open and which reflects the thinking of the majority of the United States ruling class disposed to military control of the planet. The US has chosen to unleash the first attack on the Middle East for a series of motives, two in particular : for oil and, by means of military control of the main oil regions of the planet, to exercise uncontested leadership in order to make itself a permanent threat for all potential economic and political rivals. But also because they maintain in the region what I call their fixed aircraft carrier, the State of Israel, by means of which they guarantee a tool to apply constant pressure operating via the occupation of Palestine and, as has been seen, also the attack on Lebanon.
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- > G.B. You have argued that the aggressive militarism of the US is not so much a synonym of power as, rather, a means of balancing its economic weakness. Could you explain more what you mean?
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- > S.A. According to the dominant theory, of which unfortunately a large part of European public opinion is also the victim, the military supremacy of the United States is the tip of the iceberg of a superiority ultimately based on economic efficiency and on cultural hegemony. But the reality is that the US finds itself in an extremely weak position which is clear from its huge foreign trade deficit and from that fragility derives the strategic choice of the US ruling class to end up using military violence. Pentagon documents exist which show the US has considered the possibility of a nuclear war which could cost 600 million victims : as Daniel Ellsberg has written, about 100 Holocausts.
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- > G.B. Faced with the leadership of the US, Europe appears incapable of articulating a really alternative political project. How should it move?
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- > S.A. For now, and in spite of so many Europeans who predict it, I do not believe Europe is in any shape to end up being an alternative to US hegemony. It would have to leave NATO, break its military alliance with the US and free itself from liberalism. However, right now, European social and political forces seem to be interested in anything except a project of this type, to the point that - as the old Italian Socialist Party used to in its day - they have instead reinforced Atlanticism and alignment with Nato and liberal socialism. There is no other Europe in sight. And in that sense, Europe does not exist : the European project is simply the European face of the North American project.
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- > G.B. However, the margins to build "another Europe" exist and you yourself have spoken of a conflict of political cultures that sets Europe against the United States.
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- > S.A. The political cultures of Europe were formed over the last centuries around the polarization between Right and Left : whoever was in favour of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the workers movement, the Russian Revolution, on the Left : whoever were against, on the Right. European history is the history of political cultures of the "non-consensus" which extends the conflict beyond the reductive version of class struggle. On capitalism, which has not been called into question in the United States, if there is a class struggle, there is no politicization of that struggle. In fact, the successive migrations, thanks to which the US American people was formed, have substituted a communitarian culture for the formation of political consciousness. We are witnessing today an attempt to "US-Americanize" Europe and to substitute a culture of consensus for a culture of conflict. It is pretended that there is no Right or Left, that there are no citizens, only more or less wealthy consumers.
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- > G.B. The World Social Forum, according to a superficial reading that has received some attention was born out of the alternative world demonstrations in Seattle. However the Forum's history has origins much less "western" than what is believed. Can you talk about that?
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- > S.A. So little has the World Social Forum to do with being a "western" creation that its first meeting was in Brazil; then, not by accident, the following meetings were in Mumbai, Bamako, Caracas and Karachi and the Forum which begins tomorrow has chosen Nairobi as its seat. It is handy to remember, too, that in Seattle the World Trade

Organization was paralysed not by North American demonstrators but by the vote of the majority of developing countries. One of the first meetings that gave birth to the WSF was the so-called "anti-Davos in Davos", the small but highly symbolic meeting organized in 1999 by the World Alternative Forum thanks to which representatives of the policies of liberal capitalism could discuss the official agenda of Davos. We were a few but we represented great social forces : Indian, Korean and Brazilian trades unions, women's and rural workers organizations, associations of West Africa, defenders of social rights, Brazilian movements. From there sprang the idea of holding a new meeting on a bigger scale.

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> Translation from the Spanish copyleft by Tortilla con Sal

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> Translation notes

> 1. Translated from Italian for sinpermiso.info by Leonor Març, published in Rebellion January 24th 2007

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