

SAMIR AMIN

INTERVIEW PAMBAZUKA DECEMBER 2010

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Can you tell me very briefly what your book, 'Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?', what is it about?

SAMIR AMIN: The title of my book is indicative of the intention. The title, in a provocative way, is 'Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism in Crisis?' As you can see, these are two different visions and strategies of action. Capitalism is currently in a crisis. This is not just a financial crisis which started with the breakdown of the financial system in September 2008. The financial crisis is itself the result of a long, a deep crisis which started long before, around 1975 with as of that time, unemployment, precarity, poverty, inequality, having grown continuously. And this real crisis of really existing capitalism has been overcome by financialisation of the system and the financialisation of the system has been the Achilles heel of the system. Therefore I thought that, and I wrote in 2002 that financialisation, being the Achilles heel of the system, the system will start breaking down and moving into a deeper crisis through a financial crisis, which is what happened. Now we are at that point in time and we have to look into what strategy. Can we develop ... is it reasonable to think that the system was not so bad and that therefore we should go back, restore the system as it was before the financial breakdown. That is one alternative. It is the choice of the ruling power of capital. It is the choice of, for instance, Stiglitz and people who are presented as critical - they are not critical. Or, the alternative - and it is the alternative which I think is the only reasonable one - is to look at that deep crisis of the system as the signal that the system is an obsolete system. That is, it has now come to a point where continuing the accumulation of capital is deepening and continuing the destruction of the natural basis for the reproduction of civilisation. And therefore that we ought to move and start moving beyond capitalism.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Speaking of moving beyond capitalism, in 1999 with the Seattle protests and the wave of mobilisation against neoliberal globalisation, there have been a number of organised groups that are trying to create alternatives, protesting, doing all kinds of things. Do you see this as a promising force in countering neoliberal globalisation?

SAMIR AMIN: Yes, you see, I was trying to say that the crisis has started from the middle 1970s of last century and developed fast. As of the 1980s and more the 1990s, the objective consequences of the so-called neoliberal alternative choices - which were growing monopolisation of the economy, growing liberal globalisation and financialisation - had produced the result that it had produced, that is growing poverty, precarity, poverty, etc. The people reacted to that and resisted and as you mentioned, Seattle was an indication of the protest. But even if the protest movements are growing everywhere in the world, in the North and in the South, but by and large, the social movements of protest which are perfectly legitimate, remain fragmented to the extreme. That is, people are just struggling in some place for some rights. And also as a result of that, the movements are by and large still on the defensive. That is, facing the offensive of capital to dismantle whatever they had conquered in the previous decades, trying to maintain whatever could be maintained. What is needed is to move beyond fragmentation and beyond a defensive position into building a wide alliance of progressive forces with a positive alternative.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Could you tell me concretely what that would look like? This is a movement,

that as you mentioned before, its diversity is also its strength. How could these movements mobilise to be more on the offensive?

SAMIR AMIN: Well, you see as I said in a conference at Ruskin, I have no blueprint for that and I am afraid of anybody who would come with a blueprint. The forms of organisation and action have to be and are always invented by the people in struggle and not preconceived by some intellectuals and then put into practice by people. They are the result of invention. If we look at the previous long crisis of capitalism in the 20th century, during that century, people have invented efficient ways of organising and of acting - efficient vis-à-vis the challenge of their time. I mean, forms of organisation like the trade unions, like the political parties, whether communist parties or really social democrat working-class parties or the war of liberation associated with social change - those forms of organisation and of action have been really efficient and have produced gigantic progressive change in the history of humankind in the 20th century. But they have come all of them out of stream because the system has itself changed and moved into a new phase. And the first wave has come to an end. And now, as Gramsci said, the first wave has come to an end, the second wave of more that protest, of action to change the system, is just starting and in between, the night which has not yet completely disappeared, the day which has not yet completely appeared, there are a lot of monsters who appear in this grey...

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: What kind of monsters for example?

SAMIR AMIN: Oh everything that we see around us looks as a monster. Not just the so-called terrorists that we see here and there, but the US establishment including Obama and the choice of a military control of the planet; this is a monster. The monsters are also nice ghosts, also illusions about solving the problems by going back to the past, the illusions of political Islam as a solution, the illusion of Hinduism, etc, all those para-religious illusions, all those are ghosts or monsters. But I am just saying that there is no reason why through their struggle, which are growing and will continue to grow in the coming years and decades, the people in struggle will not invent new forms of organisation.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: In an interview with Pambazuka, you talked about - if we turn specifically to Africa - you talked about African countries that have the weakest economies are also in this moment the most open and therefore the most easily exploited. And then you talked about Latin American social movements. In Africa you said that the struggle for liberation was discontinued. Why was the struggle discontinued?

SAMIR AMIN: There is never an end to history and what we have had in the 20th century and particularly in the second half of the 20th century was a first wave of emancipation of the nations of the South, particularly of Africa. I think that the independence re-conquered by the African people - it was not given on a golden plate by the West as is being said often - it was conquered by the struggles, including armed struggles which started in Kenya with the Mau Mau, which continued with the Portuguese colonies, which continued with the Algerian war of liberation. But also more pacific patterns of struggle but still struggles on a wide scale, of the peasants and working people almost everywhere over Africa and of the black working class of South Africa, not only against apartheid but simultaneously against apartheid and exploitation by capital. These were victories, but a victory in history is never the end of the story, it's just the beginning of a phase which has its own limitations, internal contradictions and coming to an end. We are moving into a second wave of emancipation of African popular classes along with liberation of their nations. We are at that point in history where the first wave has come to an end and the second is just starting. Now today for imperialism, Africa is very important because of the enormous natural resources of the continent, not only oil and gas, but also rare minerals, a lot of minerals common like copper and less common but no less important like cobalt and other rare minerals, but also more and more, land, which is becoming a scarce resource at the global level and Africa has plenty of it. But for imperialism, Africa

is important for its resources, not African people. They are rather an obstacle to the exploitation of natural resources. This is why the US and their European allies in NATO are developing a planned strategy of military control of important areas in Africa to be plundered for their natural resources. And they are assuming that the African people will remain passive and will not move into active agents which will stop their plunder of the continent. I think they are wrong. Just as the colonialists thought that the colonial system was there forever and that the peoples of Africa would have to adjust to it and they were for a number of decades adjusting to it, but that could not continue forever. Exactly in the same way, the idea that the African resources can be plundered without the African peoples responding to the challenge and taking over the control of those natural resources is a big error of judgment of imperialism.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: But even if the US is now planning a strategic control over those resources, the plunder of those resources has been going on for quite a while. If you look at the Congo, it's been more than 10 years of war that has killed so many people. If you look at East Africa, there are very insidious ways that resources are now being grabbed. And so far, there has not been a mobilised resistance. So how do you think it's going to happen?

SAMIR AMIN: Again, you are right. Until now, the plunder of natural resources of Africa continues. But I think there will be growing resistance, not only of the people, but also of the ruling classes and therefore the state-power systems. Because there is possibly an alternative to that plunder, which is the rapprochement - let's call it a Bandung 2 - that is, the rebuilding of a solidarity of African and Asian nations and peoples against the plunder of imperialism. And now the possibility of the African nations getting back the control of those resources and supported by emerging countries like China, like India, like Brazil, who do need some of those resources for their own development, but who are in a position to negotiate with and give opportunity to African states to negotiate the conditions of access which are not negotiated usually with imperialists who ask for a complete capitulation.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Moving on to a completely different but related issue, you as a writer and a thinker have been really inspiring to many people, but there are people who ask, you know the axiom that 'ideas become a material force when they grip the masses'. How are your ideas and your analysis of what is happening now and historically, how can this analysis feed into social movements and link up with people fighting their struggles on the ground?

SAMIR AMIN: Look, social movements exist and have always existed and social struggles are already there, including in Africa, but they are in Africa as elsewhere, fragmented and on the defensive. Now to move from that position into some kind of unity and building convergence with respect of diversity with strategic targets is on the agenda in Africa, as elsewhere today, which means that re-politicisation of the social movements. Social movements have chosen to be depoliticised because the old politics - the politics of the first wave of progressive social forces which have been the basis for the first wave of reconquer of national independence - have come to the end of the road, have moved into a blind alley, have lead to growing contradictions, have lost their legitimacy. So the parties which built the conquest of independence of Africa, such as the Tanzanian National Union, African Union, such as the union in Mali, national liberation movements have come to the end of the road and they have lost their credibility. Now the social movements have to re-create adequate forms of politicisation.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: How would you practically go about eradicating the gap between grassroots activists in their communities and leftist intellectuals or academics who have these really great ideas. How can we bridge the gap between these two groups of people?

SAMIR AMIN: Well, this is the responsibility of both sides. It is the responsibility first of activists in the grassroots movements to see that however legitimate their action, it's efficiency is limited by

the fact that it doesn't move beyond a fragmented struggle here or there. But it is also the responsibility of the intellectuals. I don't mean by that the academics, but those thinkers and the political people operating in politics to consider that they will have no possibility of changing the balance of powers without integrating in their movement, but not absorbing them to dominate them, but integrating the social movements on the grassroots into their political strategy of change.

Interview conducted by Zahra Moloo.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY PAMBAZUKA NEWS

* [‘Eurocentrism’](#), [‘Global History: A View from the South’](#) and [‘Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?’](#) are available from Pambazuka Press.

* Samir Amin is the director of the [Third World Forum](#).

* Zahra Moloo is an independent journalist from Kenya, currently based in London, UK.

* Please send comments to editor@pambazuka.org or comment online at [Pambazuka News](#).
