

## INTERVIEW OF SAMIR AMIN BY ALEKSANDER BUZGALIN

(A.B. means Aleksandr Buzgalin, S.A. means Samir Amin.)

A.B.: If we want to understand the meaning of « anti-globalism », - or, as we prefer to call it, « alter-globalism », - it's necessary to start from definitions. Definition means delimitation. So, that is our anti-globalist, or alter-globalist, movement, as distinct from the traditional opposition, just as we had it during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries? Then, what are main new principles of this new movement? What are its essential contradictions? And one question more, a very important question : connections between left parties and anti-globalism.

These are more or less traditional questions, but very important ones.

S.A.: So, let me start by giving you my vision of the long history of capitalist expansion which has always been global or has always aimed at being global, and try to identify the specific characteristics of each of its major stages. I think that there is no need to remind that, after all, Marx, since very early, since the Communist Manifesto, did indicate that capitalism was global, and that, therefore, the socialist revolution should be also, - in one way or another, without going into details, - global. So, surely, for us who are Marxists or Marxist-rooted, « globalism » is not something new, which appeared suddenly during the last twenty years.

But I go even beyond that. I am saying that capitalist expansion from the very start of its five-centuries history has been imperialist, that imperialism is not a stage (the latest or not the latest) of capitalism, but a constant characteristic, the continuous state of capitalist expansion. What I mean, is that capitalist expansion has always, - from the very beginning!

- been polarizing, that is, deepening the inequality between its centers and its peripheries. And that polarization was not the product of countries being backward, - in the sense that they could « catch-up » and become just in the image of the centers, - but has been shaped by, simultaneously, economic and political tools of the capitalist developed centers; and we cannot separate one from the other. So, imperialism is a permanent characteristic of the global capitalist expansion from the very beginning, from the mercantilist period and the building of the Americas as peripheries of Atlantic Europe at that time, to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the colonization of Asia and Africa, and also shaping Africa and Asia as peripheries of European capitalist centers.

But simultaneously, the characteristic of « imperialism » has been, - and that is the question for the future, for the present and the future, - always « conjugated in plural ». That is, it was not « imperialism » but the « imperialist centers » coming into a permanent conflict, and the violent one at some points in time. It was a permanent conflict not for hegemony but for sharing and resharing of the global system. The history of capitalist expansion is the history of continuous wars. It has never been created by a peaceful expansion of market and democracy as the rhetoric discourse says. It has been a history of wars, to the extent that at some point the conflict between the imperialists (plural) was occupying the forefront of the stage, and these were the moments, - if we take the relatively recent period, - of the two World Wars, first and second.

If we look at how centers and peripheries had been shaped by imperialism at the previous latest stage, - from, say, the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the Second World War, - centers and peripheries were almost synonymous to industrialized vs. non-industrialized areas, countries, regions etc. Those which were non-industrialized were put also on a subaltern political level, - whether they were colonies formally or, as the old Marxist-communist language would say, semi-colonies, dominated countries.

That was fought, of course. That pattern of capitalism and capitalist-imperialist expansion, which cannot be separated, were fought. And they were fought basically in the peripheries of the system, - or, let's call them, if you want, semi-peripheries. After all, what was Russia in 1914? A semi-periphery but still that had already moved into industrialization and with a national, local bourgeoisie and so on. It was a complex social formation...

A.B.: There also were colonies of Russia, so it was ambivalent...

S.A.: Yes. So, it was fought by, - and, in that case, in the name of, - socialist revolution, the two big cases being Russia and then, a little later, China, by political forces which were connected, historically, with Marxism, with the ideology of the working class, with a strong support in the working class, but with a capacity, - which was the reason why they were victorious, - of making a large political « people's alliance », particularly with the peasants; this is clear in the case of Russia and even more clear in the case of China. (What came later, how these societies evolved after their revolutions in the name of socialism, - is not our subject here.) But it was in fact a complex revolution, both in Russia (then Soviet Union, the Russian Empire becoming the Soviet Union) and in China; it was complex because it was a mixture of a communist utopia, - concrete utopia, - but also, in a backward country, in a periphery or semi-periphery, it targeted at catching-up. That was formulated beautifully by Lenin when he said: « It's Soviets plus electrification »; « electrification » is catching-up, and « Soviet » means catching-up with another political system which is popular-based and not bourgeois-based. And later we could see that « electrification » took the advantage and « Soviet » was emptied of its content.

But also, what happened a little later, but not so much later, after WWII, basically, in Asia and Africa, - national liberation movements were also rebellions against the results of that globalization, that is, imperialist globalization of the former stage, non-industrialization, backwardness, etc. And the programs of those movements were not so far from « electrification plus something » - « electrification plus a national populist system », which is a watered-down pattern belonging to the same family, much less radical, sometimes not radical at all, sometimes half-way...

And that took different forms in the case of Latin America because Latin America was not formally colonized, they had conquered their independence along with the United States early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in Latin America, that was « desarrollismo » which was simultaneously development and creating the basis for something like a very vague popular democracy.

Now, that is how people met the challenge of THAT globalization. To do it, to achieve it, the people invented forms of struggles, forms of organizations which have revealed themselves quite efficient in their circumstances. They invented, - and here the Bolsheviks played some important role, but already before them, the German Social Democracy, - the workers', or so-called workers' parties, strongly centralized, strongly unified, strongly able to mobilize people and to act. They invented also trade unions. They invented peasant parties and organizations. They invented a lot of forms, they invented national liberation unifying fronts which unified various nationalities, ethnicities, religious groups, classes and so on, with more or less success, but which did it...

A.B.: By the way, it is very interesting to compare antiglobalist movement and national liberation fronts.

S.A.: Yes, they were from the same family. And they invented also efficient, consistent with those forms of organizations, means of actions, including the so-called peaceful strikes, demonstrations, elections in some cases whenever it was not too fabricated or meaningless, - but also they invented wars, guerrilla, uprisings, revolutions... All those forms were efficient.

Now, what happened gradually towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, - starting from the early 70s or the mid-70s, during the three last decades of the twentieth century, - was that all those forms of rejection of the previous pattern of globalization reached their historical

limits. They were not unsuccessful, or irrational, or stupid, even as in many cases they were not democratic.

(But, after all, democracy is something quite recent in the history of humankind.) They were credible, they were legitimate because they were delivering; they were indeed allowing catching-up, more or less slowly, they were indeed creating the basis of other patterns of power than simply the power of capital. They have achieved a lot in terms of social progress, education, health and so on, - and in that case the Soviet model was remarkable in one way: even with no democracy the Soviet system has achieved in the area of education much better results than even capitalist developed countries. They have achieved the social progress, and even the populist nationalist regimes of Asia and Africa have achieved a lot. I give only the figure: when I visited the republic of Congo, former Belgian Congo, in 1961, just after the independence, there were only nine Congolese who had gone through university studies, after one century of Belgian so-called civilization, «civilizing» colonization; within thirty years, the ugliest government in Africa and perhaps in the world, that of Mobutu, has resulted in the hundreds of thousands having gone through universities; so, the achievements can be said to have been gigantic. And so on. But, precisely because they were successful, the contradictions on which they were built, have increased, developed, and they have reached the ceilings.

When they had reached the ceilings, they gradually got eroded and even bogged down, - with more or less noise, in the case of the Soviet Union with much noise, and in other cases, as in China, by being eroded from inside, deriving towards capitalism but with the central control over the process being maintained.

In other countries, in the Third World, there was a transition from national populism to neo-compradore regimes. That erosion grew as long as, when they reached their historical limits, they could not anymore deliver, or delivered very little. And then they began to lose their credibility and legitimacy.

That created the conditions for an offensive of global capitalism which led to the breakdown of the Soviet model, the evolution of China, the breakdown of the national-populist system and the reshaping of the world in accordance with the logic of further expansion of central capitalism.

But now we have to look into how is that central capitalism today. It is qualitatively different from what it was 50 years ago. It is qualitatively different, and while the major literature is stressing on the technological revolution, on its implications etc. etc., but let us see that what has changed basically is deeply related with the forms of organization of labor, of capital and of labor.

The previous pattern of organization of industries was and is gradually dismantled, and new patterns are emerging, and new processes of organization of labor. And of course, that means that previous forms of organization are losing their efficiency. And they are not immediately replaced by something new, as the people do not invent new forms in twenty-four hours, it takes historical time, for experience, for struggles and so on. Trade unions and parties were not invented by a group of intellectuals, as if such a group issued some statements, and the next day people were organized along those lines. And now it's the same. Therefore, we are in a period which is characterized by fragmentation and various attempts to invent new forms. Struggles continue but fragmented, disorganized, less organized, with no concept of what are the strategic targets and so on. And all this creates the conditions in which the initiative remains in the hands of capital; the struggles adjust, respond to new challenges, and they are not yet strong enough to compel the other side, capital, to adjust. That is one very fundamental change.

The other fundamental change is that imperialism has moved towards what I'm calling «collective imperialism of the triad», the collective imperialism of the US (plus its external province Canada), Europe (I don't know where to put its boundary now, whether I should include Poland or not), and Japan. After WWII, they came together; the easy explanation was that they were challenged by a common danger, a common enemy - the Soviet Union and Communism. That was understandable, that the bourgeoisies of all the world united to prevent eventual revolutions or an eventual Soviet invasion (although I think there was at no point in time a danger of Soviet invasion). But now, as the Soviet Union is no more there, why do they remain together? We can see

that they remain together through the institutions that are instruments for the management of the global economy and global politics. The global economic management instruments, - the instruments to manage the collective-imperialist economy, imperialist globalization, - are, basically, the G-7 (it is G-7, even if Russia wants to appear a member of it, so that it would become the G-8, or «G-seven-and-a-half»), IMF, the World Bank (the World Bank is less important than it is being said often, I think it's operating like a kind of ministry of propaganda shaping the rhetoric more than anything else; but IMF ; is important), and the World Trade Organization. On the political level, it is NATO, the military alliance headed by the US, - and we can add to it another military alliance, US - Japan. This is new collective imperialism.

That raises a series of important questions: why is it so, is it stable, are there no more contradictions among them, and if there are contradictions, what is the status of those contradictions?

Why is it so? I think it is so, and it is durable, it will continue, because things have changed, - I was speaking of labor, but it's true also of capital, - things have changed at the level of the degree of centralization of capital. As a result, now the major transnational capital corporations need access to the global market in order to be efficient. And that is new. It's a higher level of centralization and concentration of capital, much higher than the level of concentration of capital at the time of the monopolies which Hilferding, Hobson and, after them, Lenin analyzed; their analysis was correct for their time, but we are far beyond that today. And that degree of centralization has created a common interest, a feeling of common interests in the management of the globalization. And this is the basis for both the neo-liberal pattern of that management, and the military pattern of that management at the political level.

But it is at this point that the US come into the picture.

The system needs a state, - as any capitalist system, and possibly any other social system. It cannot be run by exclusively the logic of its economy, of its economics. And capitalism needs the state because capitalist interests are competing one another, as in a jungle, and there need to be a common rule, at least, to manage this competition, and that is the state. But there is no state at the level of collective imperialism, there is not a single state which embraces United States, Europe, and Japan, and probably it's not on the agenda of the visible future because of a lot of obvious reasons. Even Europe, which has a project of European Union and European integration, has enormous difficulty to create a common political system - not even a state, not even a loose confederate state; even Europe, and a fortiori the triad. And that is a problem to them, how to manage collectively the neo-liberal globalization without a common state.

Additionally, and that makes the contradictions more severe even, the political culture and the political possibilities in the various partners of the center, of the triad are very different. For example, in Europe, at least in the continental Europe, for a lot of reasons, there is a long tradition of... let us call it «socialism», of workers' parties, of Social Democracy etc. And therefore, the neo-liberal pattern of managing Europe itself is not easily acceptable, and will be less and less acceptable by growing majorities in Europe itself. And that is creating a major problem for the management of the global capitalist-imperialist system. This is one of the major dimensions of the contradictions now, and this is growing.

Now, what the US have done in that conjunction, is to make a relative advantage of its partners, Europe and Japan, to try to impose itself as the leader, and not only as the leader but as the hegemonic leader, the «Big Brother» of the «younger brothers» as it was in the Soviet system, - by making use of the relative advantage which is the military one. It's the fact, that the United States is a state while Europe is not, and that the US have developed, - for, among other things, the competition with the Soviet Union, - the most dangerous modern destructive capacity, nuclear and other, and therefore they can promote themselves to be the state that operates as the collective state of the triad, but operates, first of all, in favor of themselves, - I mean, sharing the cake not equally, but very unequally. And here is the growing contradiction. One of things that are very often said, is that the US have not only this military advantage, plus that they are a state, and a big one, but also other advantages; sometimes, there is a talk about cultural matters, that doesn't seem very important for me, but also we are told that they are economically leading the triad. And this is totally untrue! If you look at all the segments of the productive sectors of the US

economy, either the traditional sectors, which are traditional now and were the basis of the growth of the previous phase (fordist industries, chemical industry etc.), or all the basic industries corresponding to them (metallurgy etc.), or the light industries, textile and others, or even the industries related to modern technology, informatics and genetics, - you find that in all those segments, perhaps a little less with respect to the informatics and genetics, but very obviously for all other branches, the balance of the US external trade is in growing deficit which means that they are less and less competitive, less competitive with Europe and Japan in modern industries, in modern sector, less competitive with China and... I don't know whom... Brazil, in textiles or common industries, etc. That is, their economy is, really, very weak. And the result of it is being reflected in the balance of payment and in the fact that the US economy is surviving thanks to a permanent inflow of capital from outside, basically from Europe and Japan but also from the Third World through the debts, through many other processes. It is very curious, that is a new character of imperialism: previously, imperialist centers were exporting capital, now it's the opposite. That is a very parasitic position. If you look it up in the language of national accounts, national savings of the US is zero, or even negative. That is, all the investments in the US, plus all the gigantic expenditure on armaments, are financed by the rest of the world. That is a very vulnerable, weak position, not a strong one. And it is precisely because it is vulnerable that the establishment of the ruling class of the US has moved towards militarization. That is, what they cannot achieve through the competitive strength, they will achieve through war, that is by establishing to their benefit a direct military control of the planet. They would shift the balance, and they would compensate the economic weaknesses.

So, I think that we have to analyze the strategy of the enemy before we discuss our own strategy. And it is militarism, that is, imposing the military control of the planet, in such a way compensating the weaknesses. That will create, for sure, not only the resistance of the people, the responses of the people, particularly the victims, of course, but also growing contradictions with their partners, the Europeans particularly, because the project of Europe, - its formula being « well, we are as competitive, and even more, as the Americas, and then we should be respected », - will be completely annihilated by the military control of the US. This is the reason why the US have chosen the area of Middle East and Central Asia. For two reasons: one, to establish their direct and total control over oil, not only Arab and Iranian oil, but also Central Asian, Caspian etc., in order to exercise a pressure on Europe, vassalize Europe and therefore reduce its competitive capacity; and also because of the geostrategy, geography, as this is the place wherefrom they can strike at targets, in Russia, China, and India, - big countries, - and also in Iran, Palestine, Syria etc., but basically in the big countries. This is the strategy of the enemy.

Now, when we look at our side, - and I'm going to the so-called « anti-globalization », - indeed they were « anti-globalization » at the first step, because, as usual, the struggles start by opposing what is going on and saying: « we don't want that », without offering a positive alternative. And therefore, since they were movements that were rejecting the ugly social consequences of neo-liberal globalization, they were « anti-globalization ». If you look at the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, - it brought together almost exclusively a large number (not all) of individuals, movements, small and larger, who were anti-neo-liberal, that was the only common content: neo-liberalism is leading to social regression, has a very ugly « social face », we don't want it, - nothing more. The strong movement of protest against neo-liberalism, - which is normal that movement starts in that way. But if we look at the present one, World Forum III, - gigantic steps ahead have been achieved since.

First, because simultaneously the militarist strategy of the US became clear. It's not that it started after the Sept. 11 (and, therefore, after even the first WSF), it started in the early 90s, and it was formulated in the late 80s when it was obvious that the Soviet Union was going to break down with Gorbachev; and yet, the people were not aware of that military dimension, or not giving it the importance it has. Now, at the third WSF, they have perfectly understood it. This is why that big demonstration was against the war against Iraq.

A.B. And, by the way, in Florence it was one million people against war...

S.A. Yes. And it's not only because people love peace. Yes, they love peace, and that's not bad, but the movement stands against what I'm calling « US-made wars », that is, wars

which are planned, decided in Washington, according to an overall strategic plan of controlling the whole planet, starting in that region but then moving further. It's a « Hitler » vision of the conquest of the world, it's not different. And also we can continue to compare: Germany was an important industrial country but it was not the strongest industrial country, and it was to compensate its weaknesses that Hitler chose the war: « we'll conquer Europe, we'll conquer Russia, we'll have free corn from Ukrainian slaves, we'll have free labor from French slaves », etc. That was the vision. And it's very close to the American vision today. They are similar in nature.

That is one of the steps ahead, a very big step. And its expression is, how the movement is articulating both the economic (or social) and the political dimension; that is why now the charter of the World Social Forum is not simply bringing together anti-liberal movements but movements which are: a) anti-liberal; b) anti-US militarism. It's very important.

A.B. A small detail: what is the difference between the modern struggle against war and the peace movement of 60s, because it was also very big and seems very similar?

S.A. The peace movement of the 60s was against the previous pattern of wars, let's call them the remnants of colonial wars, that is, basically, the Vietnam war, which belongs to the past; I mean, it was the continuation of the national liberation which the US wanted to stop whenever it became too radical, which was the case with Vietnam. But it belongs to the previous period. Now it's an offensive war, series of wars planned by the US to control militarily the planet.

A.B. OK. It is very important.

S.A. Now, the third point. There is also a tremendous progress in the crystallization of the alternative in a positive way.

Now we can say that almost everybody, - not everybody but most active movements, - even if they differ in theoretical, ideological vision, agree or converge on three lines, in three areas.

One is social progress. Well, social progress is not socialism, it's not another economic and social system but for the different people the content of it is very clear. In those countries, like Europe, where they had social welfare etc., it's maintaining that. In countries which had, like also the countries of the former Soviet Union, such social advantages, it is their defense. Generally, the social progress means equisetum or less inequality as possible, or reducing inequalities.

I don't like the language, but « the common denominator » is eradicating poverty, that is, reducing inequality, in fact, if we are serious. It's not eradicating poverty in a « charity » system of values. It's reducing inequalities, selecting patterns of development which include and do not exclude, etc.

Second, they are converging towards the need of deepening democracy. That is, democracy with its conventional definition of pluri-partism, freedom of organization etc., but more than that. Democracy for what?

Democracy should be useful for social progress, not just what I'm calling « low-intensity democracy », when you can vote freely but it's useless because the parliament has no power, because it's the market which decides, and not the parliament; so, why do you vote in that case? This is very dangerous, this decline of democracy – in the West itself! - because it can lead to neo-populism or semi-fascism, things of that kind. And it doesn't give any legitimacy to democracy in the countries of the former East and the South.

The Russians might ask themselves tomorrow: voting for what?

A.B. It's the case already now. Most people have a rather negative attitude to democracy because it's useless for their everyday life, concerning economic, social problems...

S.A. Yes. So, what I see is that there is a very strong maturation, - unequal, as usually in history, but maturation of the understanding of deepening democracy and relating it to social progress. Democracy for social progress - which is different from the previous pattern, whether of historical socialism, Soviet and Chinese, or of historical, as I'm calling it, national populism of the South, which was achieving social progress with no democracy, from above, and not through democracy.

The third area in which maturation is going is the understanding that social progress through democracy cannot be achieved without a frame for the global system being based on the principles of recognition of rights of nations, not juridical rights only...

A.B. Sorry, one thing concerning the second point, on democracy: can we add that there are also steps forward in understanding that we should go beyond the old methods of democracy, developing such things as participatory democracy, grassroots democracy?

S.A. Yes, certainly, and that is related to the fact that the old form of organization, - parties etc., - has lost gradually its credibility and efficiency...

A.B. What you have mentioned in the beginning...

S.A. Yes. And that the people want to reinvent, need to reinvent forms of organization.

Now, the third dimension, or area, in which there is a strong maturation is the understanding that no social progress through democracy will be achieved if the pattern of relations between nations, international organization, global organization is not revised, - if, instead of being hierarchical and dominated by the centers and particularly by the US, it is not re-created with a room of manoeuvre of negotiations for the partners.

That is what I'm calling « negotiated interdependency ». Not interdependency through the market where the stronger takes everything, but negotiated. And that is precisely what the US want to destroy. This is why the US are treating the United Nations exactly as Hitler was treating the League of Nations: « we don't care; whether the Council of Security will vote, or not vote, we'll go to war alone, we'll bomb ». This is not only juridically totally illegal, - it's an illegitimate war and, therefore, those who decide that war are war criminals according to the law, by the way, - but also is a total regression. The people are understanding that, and this is why they are against the US-made wars.

So, I think that the movement is progressing fast. Perhaps one can say, not fast enough...

A.B. I think it's very fast. So big a move during two years, it's incredible...

S.A. Yes, it's incredible. What we see at the World Forum, and also at the Asian Forum in Hyderabad, and also at the European Forum in Florence, and we saw it at a number of national social forums that I attended, - is an incredible advance.

And they say along the same lines; and certainly, we are not in the end of the road. And what we see at the World Forum is the top of the iceberg, I mean what is changing, is changing at partial levels, at grassroots levels, because it is at that level that politics and political change operates, and social balance or imbalance of forces operates, and its reflection at the global level is what we meet at such global World Forum.

But the movement remains fragmented. What do I mean by « fragmented »?

First, fragmented at national levels. It's not that I am dressing of a comeback to the old centralized vanguard party who leads all the struggles, because this is not wanted by the people, and probably would not be the best, the most efficient way of doing it. But we need popular fronts, and we need popular fronts at each national level, with strategic targets. Even if that would be a product of negotiations, of compromise, respecting diversity of parties, organizations, and also specific targets, we need some common articulation of our targets at national levels.

As well as we need it in many cases at regional levels because the degree of interdependency between national levels is stronger in some regions; that is the case for Europe, but that is the case also for Latin America (the movement against the FTAA), for Africa; maybe except for the major big countries, - there are five big countries in the world, the US, Russia, China, India, and Brazil, - except for them who are, by themselves, continental countries, we need that regional dimension. And even in the case of Russia, I think, there is a need for the regional dimension, with the former countries of the Soviet Union. We need that.

We have very few cases of building such national popular fronts in the recent years. But whenever it occurred, it led to a dramatic potential for victory; that was the case of Brazil, with Lula. PT, CUT, MST and the series of organizations, including the Communist Party of Brazil and others, coming together has led to that victory. I'm not going to speak about the future and the difficulties after this...

A.B. But the victory itself is very symbolic.

S.A. Yes. But I see few countries where we are already at that point on the agenda for tomorrow. Very few countries. Maybe some minor countries but not more than that. And that is what I mean when I say that the movement is fragmented. And that is a problem which cannot be solved by the World Social Forum.

A.B. But overcoming the fragmentation, it's not an idea to create a Fifth International...

S.A. Yes, and it would be very dangerous; it probably will fail, and it would be bad. Maybe that will come later, I don't know, but it's not that which is the tool, the means for creating it.

A.B. Thank you very much.