

SAMIR AMIN

PREFACE ENGLISH FUTURE OF MAOISM

MAO IS BACK

The Marxism of the Second International, workerist and Eurocentric, shared with the dominant ideology of the era a linear view of historical progress in which every society must pass first through a stage of capitalist development before being able to aspire to socialism. The idea that the “development” of some societies (the dominant centers) and the “underdevelopment” of others (the dominated peripheries) is an imminent product of the worldwide expansion of capitalism was completely alien.

Understanding the polarization inherent in capitalist globalization is essential for formulating any view about transcending capitalism. This polarization lies behind the possible rallying of large fractions of the popular classes and above all the middle classes (whose development is itself favored by the position of the center in the world system) of the dominant countries to social-colonialism. At the same time, it transforms the peripheries into a *zone des tempêtes*, in a continual natural rebellion against the capitalist world order. Certainly rebellion is not synonymous with revolution, but only with the possibility of revolution. On the other hand, grounds for rejecting the capitalist model are not lacking in the center of the system, as 1968, among other things, illustrated. Undoubtedly, the formulation of the challenge by the Communist Party of China (CPC), at a given moment, in terms of the country-side encircling the cities, is too extreme to be useful. A global strategy of transition beyond capitalism in the direction of world socialism must articulate the struggles in both the centers and peripheries of the system.

Initially, Lenin kept some distance from the dominant theory of the Second International and successfully led a revolution in the “weak link” (Russia), though always with the conviction that this would be followed by a wave of socialist revolutions in Europe. This was a disappointed hope. Lenin then formulated a view that stressed transforming rebellions in the East into revolutions. The CPC and Mao would systematize this new perspective.

The Russian Revolution had been led by a party firmly entrenched in the working class and radical intelligentsia. Its alliance with the peasantry (represented by the Socialist Revolutionary Party) was naturally vital. The radical agrarian reform that resulted finally satisfied an old dream of the Russian peasantry: to become property owners. But this historical compromise carried the seeds of its own demise : the market produced on its own, as always, growing differentiation within the peasantry (the well-known phenomenon of “kulakisation”).

The Chinese Revolution set out from the beginning (or at least from the 1930s) on bases that guaranteed a solid alliance with the poor and middle peasantry. Moreover, the national dimension, the war of resistance against Japanese aggression, also made it possible for the communists to recruit widely from the bourgeois classes that were disappointed by the weaknesses and betrayals of the Kuomintang. The Chinese Revolution consequently produced a new situation, different from that of post revolutionary Russia. The radical peasant revolution did away with the idea of private property in agrarian land and substituted a guarantee for all peasants of equal access to the land. Up till now this decisive advantage,

which is common to no other country except Vietnam, is the major obstacle to a devastating expansion of agrarian capitalism. The debates underway in China revolve, in great part, around this question. But the rallying of numerous bourgeois nationalists to the Communist Party should have a ideological influence that is favorable to supporting the deviations of those whom Mao called “capitalist roaders”.

The post revolutionary regime in China has to its credit a good many political, cultural, material and economic achievements (industrialization of the country, radicalization of its modern political culture etc.). Maoist China also resolved the “peasant problem” that lay at the center of the decline of the Empire during two decisive centuries, 1750-1950, as described in my work “*The Future of Maoism*”. Moreover, Maoist China succeeded in achieving these results by avoiding the most tragic excesses of the Soviet Union: collectivization was not imposed by murderous violence, as was the case with Stalinism; opposition within the Party did not give rise to the institution of terror (Deng Xiaoping was removed, he returned). The objective of relative equality involving not only the distribution of income among peasants and workers but also between them and the ruling strata was pursued tenaciously, with ups and downs. It was formalized in development strategies that clearly contrast with those of the USSR (these choices were formulated in “ten great balances” at the beginning of the 1960s). It was these successes that account for post Maoist China’s extraordinary growth beginning in the 1980s. The contrast with India, which has not had a revolution, assumes its full significance here, not only in accounting for the different paths followed during the decades 1950 to 1980 but also for probable future prospects. It is these successes that explain why post Maoist China, henceforth incorporating its development into the new capitalist globalization has not suffered from destructive shocks similar to those that followed the collapse of the USSR.

The successes of Maoism have not, for all that, definitively settled the question of the long term prospects for socialism. The development strategy of 1950-1980 had exhausted its potential and, among other things, an opening (albeit controlled) was imperative. As the result demonstrated, this involved the risk of reinforcing the tendencies of an evolution in a capitalist direction. Simultaneously, the system of Maoist China combined contradictory tendencies that both strengthened and weakened socialist options.

Conscious of this contradiction, Mao attempted to bend the stick in favor of socialism through the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1974). An appeal went out to “bombard the headquarters” (the Party’s Central Committee), seat of the bourgeois aspirations of the political class. Mao believed that, to undertake this course of correction, he could rely on the youth (who, among other things, greatly inspired the 1968 events in Europe; see Jean Luc Godard’s film “*La Chinoise*”). The result of these events demonstrated the error of this judgment. The Cultural Revolution came to a close; the partisans of the capitalist path were encouraged to go on the offensive.

The struggle between the long and difficult socialist path and the capitalist option is certainly not over for good. The conflict between capitalism and socialism is the “clash of civilizations” of our time. In this struggle, the Chinese people have some significant assets, which are the heritage of the revolution and of Maoism. These assets exist in various spheres of social life. They are forcefully apparent in the peasantry’s defense of state ownership of agricultural land and guaranteed access to it for all.

Maoism contributed decisively to making an accurate assessment of the issues and the challenges represented by global capitalist expansion. It allowed us to bring into focus the challenge of the contrast between the center and the periphery immanent to the expansion of capitalism, and then to draw all the lessons that's this implies for the socialist struggle, in the dominant centers as well as the dominated peripheries. These conclusions have been summarized in a wonderful Chinese-style phrase: "Countries want independence, nations want liberation and the people want revolution". Countries, that is, the ruling classes of countries, when they are something other than lackeys, intermediaries for outside forces, devote themselves to enlarging their space for movement. This enables them to maneuver in the world system and raise themselves to the position of active participants in the shaping of the world order. Nations, that is, historical blocs of potentially progressive classes want liberation, development and modernization. People, that is, the dominated and exploited classes, aspire to socialism. The phrase allows us to understand the real world in all its complexity and therefore formulate effective strategies for action. It is part of the viewpoint that it is a long – very long – transition from capitalism to world socialism, which breaks with the short transition concept of the Third International.

The maoist solution for the agrarian question

The agrarian question lies in the heart of decisive choices in Third world countries. An inclusive pattern of development needs an agrarian radical reform, that is a political strategy based on the access to the soil for all peasants (half of humankind). On the opposite, the solutions proposed by the dominant powers –to accelerate the privatization of arable soil, and its transformation into merchandise- lead to massive rural disintegration. The industrial development of the concerned countries being not able to absorb this overabundant manpower, this one crowds together in shantytowns or risks its life trying to escape in dugouts via the Atlantic Ocean.

Access to land is a question of survival for the three billion peasants of Asia, Africa and Latin America, i.e. nearly half of humanity. No form of development is acceptable if it sacrifices the lot of those human beings. Yet, the capitalist path of development, based on private appropriation of land, which is treated as a commodity similar to others, sacrifices precisely the rural population "surplus" on the altar of increase of the "profitability" of the capital invested in agricultural production (modern equipment and "value" of land). The obvious result of this option is the transformation of the planet into one of slums, from Sao Paulo to Mumbai, from Mexico to Bangkok, from Cairo to Casablanca and Johannesburg.

The people's alternative – that of socialist oriented development – rests on the judicious principle that land is a basic natural resource, and the property of the peoples, particularly the peasantries living off it. The two great Asian revolutions (China and Vietnam) have confirmed the performance of that principle and thereby avoided the uncontrolled rural exodus which has struck at the rest of the three continents. The pursuit of this alternative implies total respect for that principle at all the stages of the long socialist transition. Certainly, the urbanization accompanying a necessary industrialization (even in specific modalities not confined to the unlimited technological imitation of capitalist models, would require a transfer of rural inhabitants to urban centers. But this should be regulated in accordance with the pace of the absorption capacities of productive urban activities; and the formulas of agricultural management should take this into consideration.

There is no question of keeping the "overpopulated" rural areas in immobilism. There could have been mistakes by thinking that an accelerated collectivization, ahead of technological

possibilities and requirements, could overcome the related contradiction. Experience has shown that an access to land, guaranteed to the peasantry as a whole in formulas linking small-scale family production with the market, is conducive to a rapid and big increase of agricultural production, in terms of peasant self-consumption rations and commercialized surpluses alike. Continuation of this progress would certainly require the invention of new forms adapted to every stage of the path of socialist oriented development. But, such forms should never be based on any abandonment of the principle of access to land for all to the benefit of eventual illusions about private appropriation of land.

All societies before modern (capitalist) time were peasant societies. Their production was ruled by various specific systems and logics—but not those which rule capitalism in a market society such as the maximization of the return on capital. Modern capitalist agriculture—encompassing both rich, large-scale family farming and agribusiness corporations—is now engaged in a massive attack on third world peasant production. The green light for this was given at the November 2001 session of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Doha, Qatar.

Capitalist agriculture governed by the principle of return on capital, which is localized almost exclusively in North America, Europe, Australia, and in the Southern Cone of Latin America employs only a few tens of millions of farmers who are no longer peasants. Because of the degree of mechanization and the extensive size of the farms managed by one farmer, their productivity generally ranges between 2 and 4.5 million pounds (1 to 2 million kilograms) of cereals per farmer. In sharp contrast, three billion farmers are engaged in peasant farming. Their farms can be grouped into two distinct sectors, with greatly different scales of production, economic and social characteristics, and levels of efficiency. One sector, able to benefit from the green revolution, obtained fertilizers, pesticides, and improved seeds and has some degree of mechanization. The productivity of these peasants ranges between 20,000 and 110,000 pounds (10,000 and 50,000 kilograms) of cereals per year. However, the annual productivity of peasants excluded from new technologies is estimated to be around 2,000 pounds (1,000 kilograms) of cereals per farmer.

Indeed, what would happen if agriculture and food production were treated as any other form of production submitted to the rules of competition? One can imagine that the food brought to market by today's three billion peasants, after they ensure their own subsistences, would instead be produced by twenty million new modern farmers. The conditions for the success of such an alternative would include the transfer of important pieces of good land to the new agriculturalists (and these lands would have to be taken out of the hands of present peasant societies), capital (to buy supplies and equipment), and access to the consumer markets. Such agriculturalists would indeed compete successfully with the billions of present peasants. But what would happen to those billions of people? Under the circumstances, agreeing to the general principle of competition for agricultural products and foodstuffs, means accepting the elimination of billions of noncompetitive producers within the short historic time of a few decades. What will become of these billions of humans beings, the majority of whom are already poor among the poor, who feed themselves with great difficulty. In fifty years' time, industrial development, even in the fanciful hypothesis of a continued growth rate of 7 percent annually, could not absorb even one-third of this reserve.

The major argument presented to legitimate the competition doctrine is that such development did happen in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe and the United States where it produced a modern, wealthy, urban-industrial and post-industrial society with modern agriculture able to feed the nation and even export food. Why should not this pattern

be repeated in the contemporary third world countries? The argument fails to consider two major factors that make the reproduction of the pattern in third world countries almost impossible. The first is that the European model developed throughout a century and a half along with labor-intensive industrial technologies. Modern technologies use far less labor and the newcomers of the third world have to adopt them if their industrial exports are to be competitive in global markets. The second is that, during that long transition, Europe benefited from the massive migration of its surplus population to the Americas.

The contention that capitalism has indeed solved the agrarian question in its developed centers has always been accepted by large sections of the left, an example being Karl Kautsky's famous book, *The Agrarian Question*, written before the First World War. Soviet ideology inherited that view and on its basis undertook modernization through the Stalinist collectivization, with poor results. What was always overlooked was that capitalism, while it solved the question in its centers, did it through generating a gigantic agrarian question in the peripheries, which it can only solve through the genocide of half of humankind. Within the Marxist tradition only Maoism understood the magnitude of the challenge. Therefore, those who accused Maoism of a "peasant deviation" show by this very criticism that they lack the analytical capacity to understand imperialist capitalism, which they reduce to an abstract discourse on capitalism in general.

Nepal 2008 , the Maoist are back

1. An authentic revolutionary advance

A liberation army that supports a generalized revolt of the peasantry reaches the gates of the capital, where the people, in their turn, rise up, drive the royal government from power and welcome as their liberator the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M), whose effective revolutionary strategy needs no further demonstration. What is involved here is the most radical victorious revolutionary advance of our epoch, and, for this reason, the most promising. One could imagine—to make a comparison—the FARC of Colombia managing to mobilize the whole of the country's peasantry (impossible to imagine), and coordinating this victory with an urban popular rising that drives out [President Alvaro] Uribe from Bogota (all also impossible to imagine), thus allowing the FARC to head the new revolutionary government!

This victory in Nepal has created the conditions of an initial success, that of a national and democratic people's revolution and characterized as an anti-feudal/anti-imperialist revolution by the CPN-M itself. Indeed, the generalized urban revolt, uniting the poorer classes with the middle class, has compelled all of Nepal's political parties to proclaim themselves, in their turn, "republican revolutionaries." It is a position they never would have thought of taking a few weeks before the victory of the Maoists, having taken the road of "peaceful combat" on the path to reformism and having invested their hopes in "elections." The other Communist party – the Union of Communists, Marxist-Leninist (UCML), had themselves joined the reformist camp and denounced "the adventurism" of the Maoists.

The CPN-M deliberately chose to make a compromise agreement with the parties in question (the Congress of Nepal, the UCML and others), estimating that by rallying to the revolution these parties had regained a minimum of legitimacy that could not be disputed among the masses.

A compromise – characterized as a “peace agreement” by the United Nations authorities that recommended it - transferred to a Constituent Assembly the responsibility for writing the new democratic and popular republican constitution. These multi-party elections gave the CPN-M first place among those parties making up the victorious coalition (thus entrusting the responsibility of prime minister to their leader, “Prachanda”). At the Parliament for the first time in the history of the country and of the entire Indian sub-continent an authentic representation from the people has been seated, including poor peasants, informal urban workers and women from the popular classes.

2. Five major challenges for the future

The compromise agreement does not resolve all the future problems; on the contrary it reveals their entire breadth. The challenges confronting the revolutionary popular forces from this point on are gigantic. We will examine them in the five sections that follow.

(i) Land reform

The peasant uprising was the product of the CPN-M’s correct analysis of the land question and of the strategic conclusions, also correct, that they drew from it: the great majority of the peasantry, consisting of super-exploited landless peasants/sharecroppers (often Dalits—“untouchables”--in certain areas of the country), could be organized in an united front and go over to the armed struggle, to the occupation of lands (which included giving Dalits access to land, which is forbidden by the caste system in India), to the reduction of the ground rents paid to owners, etc. The rising, for these reasons, gradually spread through the country, and its army, organized by the CPN-M, inflicted defeats on the state army. But it true that at the moment when the revolt in the capital opened its doors to the Communist Party (Maoist), the popular army had not yet managed to destroy the State army, which was strongly supported and equipped by the government in Delhi and the imperialist powers.

In the current moment of “compromise” two lines have been put forward by political forces associated with and represented in the Parliament: ·

The line defended by the CPN-M, that of a radical revolutionary land reform, guaranteeing the access to the land (and the means necessary to live from it) to all the poor peasantry (the great majority), nevertheless, without touching with the property of the rich peasants. ·

The vague line defended by other parties (in particular the Congress Party), regarding a more “moderate” land reform, which requires in addition, before the law sets up the new rules, a return of the old order in the areas that had already been liberated by the peasant revolt.

(ii) Future of the armed forces

The two armed forces coexist at the current time. This coexistence obviously cannot last indefinitely.

- The CPN-M suggests their fusion
- The Maoists’ adversaries fear (and admit this publicly) that such a fusion could lead to the rank-and-file soldiers of the State Army being “infected” by Maoist ideology! But they propose nothing as an alternative, and do not dare demand the dissolution of the People’s Army.

(iii) Bourgeois democracy or people's democracy?

This major question animates all the debates within the Constituent Assembly, in the political parties, in the popular organizations of peasants, women and students, in the trade unions and in various associations in which mainly the politicized layers of the middle-classes can be found.

There is in Nepalese society defenders of the conventional formula of democracy, reduced to the multi-party system, elections, the formal separation of powers (among other things an independent judiciary), to the proclamation of human rights and fundamental policies. This is the general form in which the dominant ideology, spread on a worldwide scale by the major media (among others, those of the Western countries) tries to channel the debate.

The Maoists point out that the basic rights on which proposed “democracy” rests place the respect of private property at the top of the hierarchy of so-called human rights. As a counterpoint, the CPN-M defends the priority of social rights without whose implementation no social progress is possible: the rights to life, food, housing, work, education and health. Private property is not considered “sacred”; its respect is limited by the need for implementing social rights.

In other words one group defends the concept of democracy dissociated from the questions related to social progress (the bourgeois and dominant concept of “democracy”), while the other defends that of the democracy associated with social progress.

The debate - in Nepal - is not confused, but it is often polemical. The defenders of “Western democracy” count in their ranks authentic reactionaries, who, as recently as yesterday, hardly protested against the royal autocracy, or were satisfied with minor protests, as they wished to be more associated with it. But they also count in their ranks undoubtedly sincere democrats who are not very sensitive to the real miseries from which the popular classes suffer. The NGOs of the “defense of the democratic rights,” mobilized in mass within this framework and largely supported from abroad, plead the “moderate” cause as well as they can. Some are satisfied with saying that conventional and limited democracy is better than nothing, as if more were impossible. Others draw up a list of charges against the CPN-M, calling them “inveterate Communists,” “Stalinists,” “totalitarian,” imitators of the Chinese autocratic model, etc.

The Maoists don't do a bad job of defending themselves regarding these vicious attacks. They remind everyone that they do not challenge private peasant property nor even capitalist property, national or foreign. Without of course ruling out the nationalization of property if the national interest requires it (prohibiting the foreign banks from imposing the integration of the country into the globalized financial market, for example). They call in question only “feudal” land and buildings, whose recipients had been the clients of the successive kings, authorized by them to dispossess the peasant communities. They do not challenge personal rights and the independent judiciary responsible for guaranteeing respect for those rights. They add to this program, without reducing it, by inviting the Constituent Assembly to formulate not only the great principles of the social rights, but also the institutional forms necessary to implement them. The people's democracy that they define in this manner remains, of course, to be employed gradually, by the means of the intervention at the same time of the self-organization of the popular classes as well as by the State.

Obviously there exists no “guarantee” for the future, protecting Nepal from backsliding. It could be the direction of an autocracy of the state power. Or in a not less likely opportunist alignment on what appears to be “possible” for the immediate future, consequently accepting the rallying of the CPN-M to the “moderate” line their rivals. But what right does anyone have to condemn in advance the experiment, when one knows that the questions raised here are the object of serious debates within the party? And that a plurality of opinions exists there.

These analyses and the strategies of pursuing the struggles go beyond those formulated at the time of the Bandung [Conference in Indonesia] starting in 1955. At the time the regimes that arose from the national liberation struggles of Asia and Africa, which were legitimate and popular struggles, were generally of a “populist” nature, which was recognized in the practices of the State (often confused with its charismatic hero) and of the party (made from above in certain cases, and not always very democratic in its practice even when it was based on the popular mobilizations associated with the liberation struggles) in their relations with the “people” (a word which was a vague substitute for an alliance of identified popular classes). The ideology on which the legitimacy of power rested did not use Marxism as a reference; it was manufactured of a little of this and a little of that, associating a reading of the past broadly reinvented and presented as essentially “progressive” (through allegedly democratic forms of the exercise of power in ancient societies, through religious interpretations of a comparable nature) and nationalist myths, with a pragmatism hardly critical with regard to the requirements of technological and administrative modernization. The “socialism” that characterized the Bandung regimes remained extremely vague, difficult to distinguish from populist state control that redistributed and guaranteed “social justice.” Should one call attention to the persistence of many of these characteristics in the recent advances in Latin America, where people were unlikely to be acquainted with the Bandung experience, and because of this risk reproducing the limits of Bandung?

The Maoists of Nepal developed a much different vision of the question of socialism. They refrain from reducing the “construction of socialism” to the realization even of the whole of their current maximum program (radical land reform, People’s Army, people's democracy). They characterize this program as “national democratic popular,” opening the way (but not more than that) to the long transition (secular) to socialism. They do not use the expression, “socialism in the 21st century.”

(iv) The question of federalism

The physical and human geography of the Himalayan valleys is expressed by the extreme diversity of the peasant communities of Nepal. It is not a question of two, three or four “ethnic groups,” but of 100 so-called communities, related certainly by language (Nepali or Tibetan) and religion (Hindu or Buddhist), but nevertheless proud of their individual characteristics. The people of these communities aspire to recover the use of their land, expropriated by the clients of the conquering generals in the service of the kings. They also want recognition of their dignity and equal treatment. But they do not aspire to secede.

The formula of the federal republic, promoted by the Maoists, can certainly satisfy the demands of the Nepalese people. This does not exclude the danger that adversaries of centralized state power, if necessary will manipulate this formula.

(v) The question of the country’s economic independence

Nepal is classified by the United Nations in the category of “less developed countries.” The “modern” administration of the state and the social services, and the work on its infrastructure

depend on outside assistance. The government in place appears to be conscious of the need for freeing itself from this extreme dependence. But it knows that this release can be only gradual. Food sovereignty is not Nepal's main issue, although self-sufficiency in this area is associated with often deplorably low food intakes. The organization of more effective and less expensive networks of marketing for the country producers and the urban consumers is a major problem on the other hand, because it brings into play the interests of intermediaries. That of small-scale production, half-craft, half-industrial and able to reduce dependence on imports will require difficult efforts and time to produce adequate results.

The Maoist speech raising an "inclusive" development model, that is, one profiting directly and at each stage of its deployment the popular classes, in opposition to the "Indian" model of growth associated with an "exclusive" social model, that is, profiting only 20 percent of the population, and condemning the other 80 percent to stagnation if not impoverishment, testifies to a principled choice which one can only support. Its translation in programs of implementation remains to be formulated.

3. Who will carry it out?

Revolutionary Nepal clashes with the extreme hostility of its major neighbor, India, whose ruling class fears contagion. The endemic revolt of India's Naxalites could, while taking as a starting point the lessons of the victories gained in Nepal, seriously call into question the stability of the modes of exploitation and oppression in force in the Indian continent.

This hostility should not be underestimated. It constitutes one of the reasons of the military rapprochement between India and the United States. It mobilizes considerable political material resources. Among other things, India finances the constitution of an "alternative" Hindu political party, on the model of the Indian BJP [right-wing Hindu chauvinist], the analogue of the political Islam of Pakistan and elsewhere or the political Buddhism of the Dalai Lama [Tibet] and others. The support of the United States and other western powers – Britain in particular - is coordinated through these reactionary projects. The crystallization of a powerful Nepalese Hindu political force would have a chance for success if the achievements - even modest – of the new Nepal were delayed for too long a time. Those intervening from outside could then also mobilize the Nepalese reactionaries and may even provoke "secessionist" movements. The use of outside assistance, always with strings attached even if this is not acknowledged, and demagogic speeches concerning "human rights" and democracy, that the NGO networks feed, finds its place in this strategy of the enemy.

The compromise now in force delays the implementation of the radical reform program that is at the source of the popularity of the CPN-M. It encourages certain tendencies - in the ranks of the political leadership itself - to want to hang on to what this compromise allows, thus preparing the ground for the counter-offensive of the reaction.

But there is no need to despair. The Maoists publicly repeat that the popular classes have the right to remain mobilized and to continue their combat to carry out their program, whatever the results of the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly. The CPN-M did not fall into the electoral trap of seeking votes above all else. They carefully distinguish what they call their social base ("social constituency"), made up of the majority (poor peasants, urban workers of the popular classes, students and the young people, women, and patriotic and democratic sectors of the middle-classes) from their electoral base ("electoral constituency"), which, as

with all electoral bases, remains volatile. To build this popular social base into a ruling organized social block, an alternative to the feudal-comprador block thrown out of power, constitutes the objective of the long-term combat of the CPN-M.