

RUSSIA TO DAY

ATTENTION page 10 add in French

I portrayed my vision of the place that the Eurasian space (with borders from Poland to China) occupied in successive stages of the formation of the global system in an earlier paper "La Russie dans le système mondial : géographie ou histoire ?" (Russia in the Global System: Geography or History?) republished in "Les Defis de la mondialisation" (The Challenges of Globalisation), 1996, and in this context defined the challenges faced by the Russian Empire and subsequently the USSR. Here , I propose to focus on the challenges which post Soviet Russia has faced since that time. However great the transformations that have taken place in Russia over the course of the last fifteen years may appear, they are not "revolutionary" (or "counter-revolutionary"), they are the result of the acceleration of underlying trends that were already in existence within the Soviet system in the 1930s and have been gathering force since then.

I will not limit myself on this subject to stating that Soviet society at that time was not (or no longer) "socialist", as the promoters of the 1917 revolution wanted, but was a specific type of capitalism (which I described as "capitalism without capitalists") destined to become "normal" capitalism (i.e. capitalism with capitalists), which is indeed the plan of the new ruling class (which sprang from the preceding class, no less) even though, as we shall see, the reality of the system that it has put in place falls extremely short of this plan. I will go further by proposing an analysis of the characteristics of the Soviet system (as a social system, a power system and a method of integration into the global system) and their continued existence in deteriorated forms in Russia today.

Basic Characteristics of the Soviet System

I define the Soviet system by five basic characteristics: corporatism, autocratic power, social stabilisation, economic delinking from the global capitalist system and its integration into this system as a superpower. The concept of "totalitarian regime", popularised by the dominant ideological discourse is shown here as elsewhere to be flat and hollow, incapable of taking account of Soviet reality, its methods of management and the contradictions that led to the evolution and transformation under way.

One: A Corporatist Regime

By corporatist regime I mean that the working class (supposed to become "ruling" class) had lost its unifying political consciousness both through the purpose of the policies put in place by those in power and through the objective conditions of the rapid mushrooming of their number during accelerated industrialisation. The workers of each enterprise, or group of enterprises forming a "combinat", together with their management and directors constituted a social/economic "block" and defended their place within the system. These "blocks" confronted each other on all levels: in negotiations (bargaining) between ministries and departments of Gosplan and in daily dealings with enterprises from combinats other than their own. The unions, reduced to work management (work and employment conditions) and the social benefits of the workers concerned, found their natural place in this corporatist system.

The corporatism in question had a crucial role to play in the reproduction and expansion of the system as a whole. It involved a double substitution: (i) of the principle of "profitability" that in the last resort governs decisions to invest in capitalism, and (ii) of the market that in capitalism still defines the way in which prices are determined. Corporatism constituted the reality that "planning" hid through its intentions to gain acceptance for a "so-called scientific rationale" of the macro-economic management of the production system.

Corporatism emphasized the regionalist dimension in the negotiations/bargaining between competing blocks. This regionalism was not based on the principle of "national" diversity (as in Tito's Federal Yugoslavia). The relationship between Russia – the dominant nation both numerically and historically - and other nations was not a "colonial" one. The redistribution of investment and social benefits that

operated to the detriment of the "Russians" and to the benefit of the peripheral regions bear this out. In this regard, I do not accept the nonsense of comparing the USSR to an "imperial" system dominating its "internal colonies" in spite of the impression of the "dominance" of the Russian nation (and even the arrogance of some of its expressions). Perhaps the Baltic states will learn that they have exchanged an advantageous position from which they benefited as part of the USSR for a subjugated position within the European Union! The Caucasians and the peoples of central Asia will be brutally dealt with as colonies by the Westerners, having lost the bargaining power that they enjoyed within the USSR!

The regionalism in question concerned small regions (within the republics to which they belonged) with common interests to defend in a global system that ensured their independence which was in fact always more unequal than Gosplan's rationalising discourse claimed.

Two: Autocratic Power

The choice of the term is not intended to weaken the critique of the system, "the absence of democracy" is easy to see whether representative (elections here bore no surprises) or participative proposed, naturally, as imagined by the revolutionaries of 1917, the unions and all possible forms of social organisations that had been submitted to central State control, thus effectively prohibiting participation in decision-making on all levels.

But this fact provides no explanation of the pseudo-concept of "totalitarianism". Autocratic power was disputed within the ruling class - the representatives of the corporate blocks. What to outward appearances was an autocracy masked the reality of a power that rested on the "peaceful" resolution of corporatist conflicts through consideration for one another.

Here again, the autocratic management of the conflicts in question necessarily took on regional dimensions. The structure of the system comprised a pyramid of powers that fitted together ranging from management (always autocratic) of local interests to those of the Union and the Republics. This regional dimension, sometimes but not necessarily "ethnic", facilitated the break-up of the Union and the threatened break-up of the Republics (Russia first) which is today a dangerous challenge for central powers.

Three: Stabilised Social Order

It is not my intention to ignore the extreme violence that accompanied the building of the Soviet system. These violent acts were of different kinds. The major conflict pitted the defenders of the socialist plan at the origin of the revolution against "realists" who, in practice if not in their rhetoric, gave absolute priority to "catching up" through accelerated industrialisation-modernisation. This conflict was the inevitable result of the objective contradiction that the revolution faced. It was necessary to "catch up", (or at least reduce the gap) as the revolution inherited a "backward" country (I find the expression "peripheral capitalism" preferable), and simultaneously build "something else" (socialism). I have stressed this contradiction, which I placed at the heart of the problems related with overcoming capitalism on a world scale (the "long transition from capitalism to global socialism"), and will not return to it here. The victims of this first major cause that led power to resort to violence were communist militants.

A second type of violence accompanied accelerated industrialisation. Some aspects of this type of violence can be compared to the type of violence that accompanied the construction of capitalism in the West, the massive migration from the countryside to the towns and the wretched circumstances associated with proletarianization (overcrowded accommodation, etc.). The fact remains that the USSR carried out this construction in record time - a few decades - compared with the entire century it took in central capitalist countries. The latter benefited from the extra advantages of their dominant imperialist positions and the option of allowing their "surplus" population to emigrate to the Americas. The violence of the primitive accumulation in the USSR is, in this respect, no more tragic than it was elsewhere. On the contrary, no doubt, for the accelerated industrialisation in the USSR allowed the children of the popular classes to benefit from massive social mobility unknown in the systems of the countries of central capitalism dominated by the bourgeoisie. In spite of everything else, it is this "specificity" inherited from original socialist intentions that won the majority of the working classes and even "collectivised" peasantry over to the system, even if autocratic.

Furthermore, let us not forget the violence committed by the dominant global capitalist system: military intervention, the most savage form of Nazi aggression and economic blockades.

The Soviet system, however contradictory it may have been, succeeded in building a social order capable of stability which was in fact stable during its post-Stalin period. Social peace was "bought" by moderation in the exercise of power (although still autocratic), the improvement of material conditions and tolerance of "illegal" discrepancies.

Certainly, stability of this kind is not destined to last "eternally" but no system is, in spite of the claims made by ideological discourse (be it "socialist" or capitalist "liberalist"). Soviet stability masked the contradictions and limitations of the system which summed up its difficulty in passing from extensive forms of accumulation to intensive forms of the latter, like its difficulty in emerging from autocracy and allowing the democratisation of its political management. Yet this contradiction might have found a solution in an "evolution" towards what I described as the "centre left": the opening-up of market spaces (without challenging the dominant forms of collective property) and democratisation. Perhaps this was the intention of Gorbachev, whose failed attempt - naïve in many ways - brought down the regime "on the right" from 1990 onwards.

Four: Economic delinking of the Soviet System

For the most part, the Soviet production system was effectively delinked from the dominant global capitalist system. I mean by this that the rationale that governed the economic decisions of those in power (investments and pricing) did not derive from demands for "open" integration into globalisation. It is thanks to this disconnection that the system succeeded in progressing as swiftly as it did.

This system was not, however, "wholly" independent of the "rest of the (capitalist) world". No system can be and the delinking, in my definition of the concept, is not a synonym of "autocracy". Through its integration in the global system, the USSR occupied a "peripheral" position, mainly as an exporter of raw materials.

Five: Military and Political Superpower

Through the success rather than the failure of its construction, the USSR succeeded in working its way up to the rank of military superpower. It was the Soviet army that defeated the Nazis then, after the war, succeeded in record time in ending the United States' nuclear and ballistic monopoly. These successes are at the origin of its political presence on the post-war world scene. In addition, Soviet power benefited from the prestige of its victory over Nazism and that of "socialism", which it claimed to be the expression of, whatever the illusions concerning the reality of this "socialism" (sometimes described as "really existing socialism"). It made "moderate" use of it in this sense, contrary to the affirmations of anti-Soviet propaganda, it did not set out to "export the revolution" or to "conquer" western Europe (the spurious motive used by Washington and European bourgeoisies to get NATO accepted). It did, however, use its political (and military) might to compel dominant imperialism to pull back from the third world, opening up a margin of autonomy for the dominant classes (and the peoples) of Asia and Africa which they lost with the fall of the USSR. It is not by chance that the United States' hegemonic military offensive developed with the violence we have witnessed from 1990 onwards. Soviet presence from 1945 to 1990 imposed a "multi-polar" organisation on the world.

New Forms of Capitalism in Russia

I use the terms of the title of this section deliberately thus avoiding the term "neo-liberalism". This expression, which I use like every one else because it is imposed by dominant discourse, should in fact rule out any serious thinking for it only concerns (dubious) ideological rhetoric.

"Neo-liberalism", or more generally liberalism, will be called into question both in the West and in the East, when its failure is recognised. In fact "liberalism" is to "really existing capitalism" what "socialist" discourse was to "really existing socialism": an ideological tool designed to eliminate the analysis of true questions. "Liberalism" promises everything at once: "effectiveness" (without defining the terms), "democracy", "peace" and even social justice! The implementation of the policies practised in its name produce anything but, almost the opposite in fact: stagnation (and in some cases even

decline), the deterioration of democracy (or even the reinforcement of autocracies), permanent war and increasing inequality. Yet it matters little, we are asked to "wait"...

The collapse of the Soviet system, reinforced by that of the populism of the third world and the erosion of the social-democrat commitment in the West have allowed so-called liberal ideology to triumph and led to vast support for its discourse. This is true in Russia as elsewhere. Incidentally, I have pointed out the illusion entertained according to which, as Germany and Japan had "lost the war but won peace", Russia would, thanks to liberalism, undertake accelerated and (finally) effective modernisation in democracy. We forget - or pretend to forget - that Washington's objective is not to allow the rebirth of a strong Russia (any more than that of a strong China), even if capitalist, but to destroy it.

Have fifteen years of "reforms" culminated in the setting up in Russia of a capitalist system capable of "stabilising" and thereafter of putting the country effectively on the path of liberalist promises? Reality obliges us to answer no: the USSR has disintegrated and in turn Russia lives under the threat of disintegration, none of the institutions in place (its private enterprises or its state) are equipped to carry out the necessary investments to improve the effectiveness of the production system (on the contrary, disinvestment is massive), and the systematic destruction of the Soviet system's positive achievements (education in particular) do not point to a "brighter future". It is difficult to see how a system with these characteristics could "stabilise" without understanding its stabilisation for a time at a level of complete destitution and powerlessness.

So, in fact, these new forms of capitalism in Russia have increased rather than reduced the characteristics of a Soviet system that has reached an extreme stage of decline.

One: The Integration of the New Russia as a Minor Periphery of the Contemporary Imperialist Capitalist System

"Open" Russia is not only an "exporter of raw materials" (oil first and foremost), it is liable to become no more than that. Its industrial and agricultural production systems no longer benefit from the attention of the authorities and are of interest to neither the national private sector nor foreign capital.

There has been no investment worthy of the name to make their progress possible and they only survive at the expense of the continued deterioration of their infrastructure. The capacity for technological renewal and the high quality education that underpinned it in the Soviet system is being systematically destroyed.

Who is responsible for these massive declines?

First, of course, the new ruling class which for the most part originated from the former Soviet ruling class made fabulously rich, no doubt, through the privatisation/pillage from which it has benefited. The concentration of this new class has, moreover, reached uncommon proportions, to the extent that the term "oligarchy" suits them perfectly. The similarity with the oligarchies of Latin America is certainly striking. This class owes its increasing wealth to three sources: income from oil (which depends on world circumstances, i.e., high or low prices of crude), the cannibalisation of industries (privatised industrial firms are not destined to form the basis of increased and more efficient production but only to allow the oligarchies to survive through their decline) and commission from opening the country's markets up to imports. Rent income and commissions still define a comprador bourgeoisie, not a "national" bourgeoisie.

Imperialism benefits from and supports the country's decline to the rank of minor periphery. Essentially, as far as Russia and other former USSR republics are concerned, the United States plans to reduce them to the rank of minor de-industrialised and therefore powerless peripheries. In other words, to "Latin-Americanise" the former Soviet East (the former USSR and Eastern Europe). The methods are designed in varying proportions depending on the case ranging from total destruction for countries with a revolutionary past (Russia and Yugoslavia) to a milder form of subordination in "conservative" Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, etc.).

Of course, in the context of this common vision shared by the powers that be in the United States and in Europe, a certain competition may be revealed between the different associates of the imperialist

triad. Who will have most to gain from this Latin-Americanisation? The United States or (western) Europe? The current compromise leaves eastern Europe mainly to Germany and Russia to the United States. NATO (under the preponderant influence of the United States), the WTO and Brussels (whose liberal options only serve to strengthen those of the WTO) are entrusted with the task of "managing" this essentially asymmetrical system. The fact remains that the management of the political responsibilities of collective imperialism is riddled with contradictions which I have analysed elsewhere and which I will not go into again here. European/United States competitiveness is at work in the context of this management and in this respect Washington has several cards to play which cannot be ignored. These include, obviously, London's unwavering Atlanticist option and also that of the servile political classes of Eastern Europe. Europe missed the opportunity to build a rapprochement with Russia that would have for sure reinforced its autonomy vis a vis the US hegemonic attitude.

The oligarchy's explosion of wealth has led to the formation of a new "middle class" known as the "new Russians". The jobs these people hold are entirely unproductive and derived from the oligarchs' spending, whereas the former middle class, made up of professionals and engineers who were in general far more highly qualified and certainly more productive, have ended up with the popular classes and among the victims of this comprador capitalist development. Moreover, the monopolistic oligarchies, the exclusive beneficiaries of state generosity, make the formation of a class of authentic and inventive entrepreneurs impossible. They are persecuted by mafias and the state itself, making the appearance of capitalism "from the base" impossible.

The liberal discourse according to which the "winners" of the system are the most highly qualified and inventive individuals while the "losers" are the "least productive" workers does not stand up to any serious examination. In actual fact, the "losers" are all those working in production in the new Russia.

Two: Irresponsible Autocratic Power

The capitalist forms of the new Russia exclude all democratic progress.

Autocracy is no longer a "vestige of the past" here but a necessary form of existence of the comprador oligarchy's power. The new constitution of 1993 established, to serve it, a presidential regime that reduces the powers of the Duma (elected parliament) to nought. As we know, western governments pretend to ignore it, saving their reproaches for the democratic deficit in the only regimes that resist liberalism while they approve the dictatorship of those that serve it.

The distinguishing feature of the new autocracy as compared with the former one lies elsewhere, namely, in the totally irresponsible character of the power that it exerts. The autocracy is at the service of the oligarchy and takes part in the battles that the clans are engaged in even though it knows how to ensure it is paid for services rendered. In fact, this autocracy has placed itself at the service of globalised oligopolistic foreign capital which it implements without the slightest resistance from the diktats issued by the WTO, the IMF and even NATO!

The conflicts that recently pitted Putin against certain oligarchs have not brought about significant change in the organisation of the system. Putin's objectives remained limited: first of all, to strengthen the positions of the clan of the St Petersburg oligarchs (the new president's client base) to the detriment of the others, then - perhaps - to "rationalise" the system by separating more distinctly autocratic presidential state bureaucracy from the class that it has never renounced serving. Each has his role but all are part of the same play.

Are the "Russian people" responsible for this decline? Certainly to some extent through the utter confusion they find themselves in following the brutal collapse of the Soviet institutions (sometimes destroyed by cannon fire, as was the case with the first elected parliament!). The new political parties had no social or ideological basis that would have allowed them to emerge from their inexistence. The new "right" reduced in fact to individual irresponsible cliques originating from the former system have certainly successfully handled demagogic rhetoric amplified by the corrupt media at their service. Their stories are no less rapidly used, faced with generally intelligent public opinion that is evidence of the considerable politicisation of the Russian people. Because of this, the new right rapidly found itself a prisoner of the support of the bureaucratic power of the new autocracy. The fact remains that the Communist Party, in spite of the hopes placed in it by a large minority of the electorate (nearly

50%), did not know how to reinvent itself (and move away from its legacy of the autocratic administration of power) or even resist the pressure of the new dictatorship. On the contrary, it has facilitated its establishment by subscribing to the new constitution. It then tried to make people forget its stupid cowardice and the major errors that it made by initiating ambiguous "nationalist" discourse. But the embryonic political parties of the alternative left have not proved their capacity to undermine the plans of the new oligarchy and rapidly withdrew into intellectual chapels isolated from the popular classes.

Three: Degenerated and Weakened Corporatism

Faced with the obtuse and declining Communist Party, the trades unions could have provided effective pole of resistance as they have retained the respect and support of their members, who number in their millions, for at least 12 years.

The major error made by trades union leaders was to think that the former corporatism that surrounded them could guarantee their "survival". It is true that the objective situation facilitated this error of judgement and perspective. In the great majority of cases, directors and people in managerial positions in the enterprises excluded from the new system of oligarchic powers remained "on the side of their workers" in the daily fight for the survival of production. For their part, some social-democrat ideologists cherished the illusion that the establishment of the tripartite combination that they recommended (employer, union, state) allowed a kind of positive "historical compromise". These ideologists were a war too late –social democracy in the West even having announced its conversion to liberalism - and were not sufficiently aware that the model of peripheral capitalism under construction in Russia excluded all "social" forms of managing it.

The cowardice of trades union management and the illusions that they were under did not prevent social struggles from breaking out here and there (numerous strikes) and sometimes power from being pushed back as was the case with the threat of bringing the country to a halt through the resistance of the railway workers. However, these struggles did not succeed in bringing about much needed reviews in the methods of trade union management and the attempts of a few groups from the "new left" to re-establish working-class life on independent and new union bases achieved no more than anecdotal success.

This combination of unfavourable factors sowed the seeds of the decline of the trade unions organisation seen over recent years. The collapse of the social services that the trades unions had managed under the Soviet system has, for its part, contributed to this disaffection.

Four: Uncontrolled Regionalism

The strong regionalism of ageing Sovietism has entered a phase of destructive decline. Regionalism was formerly controlled, not necessarily by state violence but rather by the responsible concern of the Soviet autocracy to accept the necessary compromises.

The clans of the new irresponsible autocracy think, on the contrary, that it is useful to exploit regionalism to serve their short term objectives. In some cases this adverse trend has gone very far and this is borne out by the Chechen situation.

That there were serious questions waiting to be answered in certain regions, especially in the "non Russian" areas of the Russian Federation, cannot be ignored. No one can doubt that "external forces" tried to exploit these difficulties including, of course, the United States and their Islamic allies in the case of Chechnya. However, Moscow is responsible for the deterioration of the situation. A large majority of the Chechen people rejected the "Islamists" appeals for secession. Those in power in Russia refused the support of this majority and deliberately opted to play the "military intervention" card with scant regard for the consequences of this decision. Clearly this was the product of mediocre calculations on the part of the clans of the oligarchy (interested, for example, in the route of the oil line from the Caspian Sea) and the state bureaucracy (rebuild "the unity of the Russian people" and obtain their "unconditional" support in the face of "the external and terrorist enemy").

It is known that the terrorist attacks in Moscow and elsewhere, which has not been proven to be the work of Chechens, have fulfilled similar functions to 11 September exploited as we know by the Bush administration.

In this respect too, Putin's administration does not seem to have broken with the errors made by Yeltsin. The second Chechen war undertaken by Putin resulted in the same failure as the first and has been "exploited" in the same way by the two following presidents. Putin can be credited with a reform of the territorial organisation of the powers designed to put an end to regionalist flare-ups. The fact remains that this reform is still commanded by the principle of the autocracy (doubling the elected governors by a kind of appointed prefects) and refuses to rely on the populations concerned (which would risk strengthening their capacity for resistance to the pressure exerted by the oligarchs). The reform undertaken is therefore not likely to favour the correct solution of open or latent conflicts.

Five: Russia Removed from the International Scene

Since then Russia has held a minor position in G7, now G8 (G71/2). Yet for all that it is not an active player in the functioning of global balance. To all appearances, it preserves considerable military power, second in the world in terms of its nuclear equipment and ballistic missiles although the deterioration of its military organisation gives reason to fear that it may be incapable of using this arsenal effectively, in the event it were necessary, which is to say in the event of United States aggression.

It goes without saying that this removal poses a problem for the future of the global system. Which "camp" will Russia eventually settle in, in the event political differences between certain European countries (France and Germany) on the one hand and the United States on the other succeed in splitting Atlanticism, which is still in command of the collective imperialism of the triad, or if the conflict with certain Southern countries (China, or even India, Iran or North Korea) were to grow. Certainly in the short term, the question does not arise: Europe remains Atlanticist in spite of the gnashing of teeth by a certain few. Even if Russia were to align itself, like China, with France and Germany in order not to give Washington carte blanche in aggression in Iraq, the gesture has not brought about a "switch of alliances". Moscow is still hitched up to the American cart in spite of some (moderate) defiance. Washington made no mistakes in that respect and reserved its violent condemnation for the French alone. The pressure exerted by the military presence of the United States in central Asia and Caucasia, their recent establishment in Georgia and their manipulation of the Islamic threats have so far managed to keep Russia out of the big international game. Russia could derail the US plan aiming at reducing its economy to the statute of a minor subordinated periphery. It could do it by playing an active role in the revival of a "southern front" including China. But Russia did not choose this way but rather the opposite. Russian calculations are based on the illusion that only its alliance with the US can protect her from eventual chinese expansionist ambitions in Siberia and central Asia. By doing so, in fact, Russia reinforces the chances of the US plan aiming at isolating its major potential competitor, i.e. China. I do not believe that Russia will be paid back for this "service", which, on the opposite, will accelerate its decline.

Yet the fact remains that all these balances (or imbalances) which benefit the United States remain fragile and the certain failure of their intervention in Iraq will sooner or later end up calling them into question.

Will Russian diplomacy find its place with the new deal of the cards? I will come back to this question which is one of the major dimensions of the construction of an alternative to liberal American globalisation.

Six: Ideological Decline

Soviet ideology continued to feed on supposedly "socialist" rhetoric. Even severely depleted, Soviet power knew that its legitimacy lay in the Revolution of 1917. This is irritating and even derisory. Yet the distance that separated this rhetoric from Soviet reality was no greater than that which separated "liberal" discourse from really existing capitalism and just as a good number of normal individuals support liberal discourse in spite of the social catastrophe that accompanied the reality of it, it should come as no surprise that "socialist" discourse has had its believers up to the very last.

The new oligarchic autocracy needs to take the opposite view of Soviet discourse but it does not know what to replace it with. Stories about economic effectiveness and democracy are not credible in Russia even though they may be in eastern Europe. "Patriotic" discourse, therefore, constitutes this power's last hope now that it finally has its back against the wall. The rhetoric in question serves to remove the real problems (social inequality, the destruction of the 1917 conquests, the ineffectiveness of new economic management and the loss of the international role of the country), while pretending "to unite the whole country behind its leaders", implying that the latter "resist" dominant globalised capital.

I note here that this comprador bourgeoisie discourse closely resembles that of other ruling classes with the same type of development elsewhere, in Asia and in Africa. All comprador classes that rule contemporary peripheries try to give themselves a "patriotic" image although they are responsible for the decline that their nations are suffering and in fact only facilitate the ("foreign") domination of international capital.

Patriotism in a positive sense is (now more than ever) certainly necessary in Russia, as it is elsewhere, faced with the challenges of American liberal globalisation as long as it is conceived of as a positive element in the construction of self-sustained development while remaining open at the service of all working classes and not as demagogic and deceitful rhetoric as is the case as regards the discourse of the new Russian power.

The fact remains that the ideological discourse of the new Russian power has no real hold over its people. Evidence for this can be seen in its increasing need to resort to elections that are openly falsified on a large scale. In other words, we are dealing with a power devoid of legitimacy and credibility or perhaps this new Russian capitalism is incapable of finding a centre of gravity around which to stabilise its power.

The opposition's deficiency is also revealed by its ideological discourse. Communist Party leaders have rallied round the "patriotic" discourse of power barely giving it more precise contents. Rather like those in Muslim countries who, "threatened" by the wave of political Islamism, try to surpass their opponents in their chosen field in the belief that in this way they will exercise the latter's powers of attraction. Others invoke "Euroasianism", that is to say nationalism that is both anti-American and anti-European, and recommend a rapprochement with Asia (China, India, Iran). This rapprochement would certainly be one of the requirements for the formation of an alternative globalisation. However, there is no need for dubious para-ideological legitimacy which only distances support for modernist universalism, even if of "western" origin, and therefore thus far deformed by the reality of the imperialist system of which the West in question is the centre.

There is no doubt that serious alternative views derived from criticism of Sovietism from the left aiming to forge ahead with socialist reconstruction would find favourable terrain in Russia. However, there is no choice but to accept that up till now these visions have not moved out of left intellectual circles and have no hold on the people.

Is There a Worthwhile Alternative in Russia Today ?

The picture of Russia I have portrayed in the preceding pages may seem seriously pessimistic as regards the future of the country. In fact the failure of new Russian capitalism and its inability to provide the conditions for stabilisation should, on the contrary, be reason for optimism. It is sometimes said in Moscow that Russia, as on the eve of 1917, is almost ripe for a new revolution or for radical transformation capable of redressing the direction of evolution. With what local and global perspectives? Under what conditions?

The basic principles on which the alternative to the current system in place in the world should be established are simple, clear and in fact largely understood. On internal ("national") plans: (i) a "mixed economy" that on the one hand gives the state the means to orient overall development and on the other offers private property and the market a sufficient profit margin to make the promotion of initiatives possible; (ii) the institutionalisation of worker/enterprise/state collective bargaining; (iii) the development of representative democracy through the promotion of participative democracy initiatives. On a global scale: (i) the organisation of the negotiation of forms of economic management (trade, capital flows, technological transfers, monetary management) based on the acknowledgement

of the diversity of interests and the inequality of the partners; (ii) acknowledgement of the principle of the sovereignty of the people reinforced by support for the progress of democratisation, the foundations of a multi-polar political world. The implementation of all of these principles would make it possible to begin an initial stage on the road to the "long transition to world socialism".

Of course, these very general principles which are valid for all (China or Russia, Germany or the Congo) only come into their own when put into practice in a way that respects the diversity of objective situations.

For Russia this means: (i) the re-nationalisation of large enterprises, particularly in oil and energy (therefore expropriation of the oligarchy); (ii) the invention of new forms of joint management (workers and leaders) of the industrial and commercial enterprises, whether these should be formally public (state, communities, workers collectives) or private; (iii) the reestablishment and reinforcement of public social services, education (which was of a high standard in the USSR) and scientific and technological research; (iv) the abolition of the constitution of 1993 and the elaboration of an authentically democratic constitution by a large elected convention; (v) support for forms of popular intervention of participative democracy; (vi) the initiation of extensive negotiation between the republics of the former USSR to enable the construction of an economic and political regional space that respects the autonomy of the partners and is capable of establishing interdependence to the benefit of all; (vii) the re-establishment of Russian military power (until there is a general disarmament when the United States are prepared to submit to one); (viii) the development of negotiated commercial, technological and financial arrangements initiating the construction of a "great Europe" from the Atlantic to the Pacific; (ix) the development of a foreign policy that is active and independent (of United States policy in particular) designed to strengthen the institutions responsible for the construction of a multi-polar world.

From the perspective of the alternative globalisation envisaged here, the place and the roles fulfilled by the national partners shall by force of circumstance remain specific and different from one another. Russia shall occupy the place of both a major producer/exporter of raw materials (oil and mineral products) and renewed industrial power (without being necessarily subject to the hazards that the search for "competitiveness" on a so-called open world market implies). China's place, by comparison, is that of a new industrial power whose production would be commanded principally by the enlargement of its internal market and only accessorially by its exports (the opposite of the principle that the WTO is determined to impose). This option would mean in China, as elsewhere in Asia and Africa, appropriate solutions to the agrarian problem based on acknowledgement of the right of access to land for all peasants (I refer here to what I have written elsewhere on the subject). Certainly, Russia also still has an agrarian problem (as does Eastern Europe) that cannot be resolved by the development of capitalism as it was in the developed centres of the global system. But the questions are posed here in rather different concrete terms from those that characterise the countries of the "third world" (Asia, Africa and Latin America) and require appropriate solutions.

The government of Yevgeny Primakov had well and truly begun a recovery programme along the same lines as those described here with, it seems, plenty of determination but also considerable prudence in the first measures taken (which is easy to understand). As Gorbachev might have wished to do but did not know how, Primakov envisaged the construction of a "centre left" economic and political system. First, Primakov was the victim of the inability of the Communist Party (still powerful at the time) to understand and support the initiative. He was also the victim of international hostility mainly from the United States but, unfortunately, also from Europe which did not abandon its intention to "Latin-Americanise" the former USSR (and also Eastern Europe through the process of its integration into the European Union).

The result of this failure facilitated the initial success of the United States offensive in the Middle East, central Asia and on a world scale, and reinforced the submission of Putin's regime to their immediate requirements. This fact has led Russia and the whole world to a crossroads: either American plans will be derailed (and that has become a prerequisite for the construction of an alternative on all levels) from national to global levels, or it will (for a time) continue to be deployed (with Bush or Kerry)

annihilating the potential for transformation in the direction of the democratisation and the social progress of all societies.

In this fight, the responsibility of the people is paramount in Russia as it is elsewhere. The reinforcement of the social struggles and democratic demands, the dissipation of the illusions and the beginning of the reconstruction of a new open left, capable of winning over the popular classes, which the Communist Party and the Unions try to continue to treat as "clientele" at the service of their short term political calculations, are positive signs of possible recovery in Russia.

Europe's responsibility is no less important. Europe must stretch out its hand to Russia. It must relinquish its vision, which is still that of a partner of the collective imperialism of the triad that is aligned on the plans of US hegemony. As I said earlier, in order to do that, it will have to find a way out of the "quicksand" in which it has become mired.

Poutine a peut-être maintenant compris que l'objectif des Etats-Unis et de l'Europe alignée est de détruire la Russie et non de l'aider à se rénovier. Mais le système sur lequel il fonde son pouvoir ne lui permet pas de résister avec efficacité aux assauts destructeurs de la triade impérialiste. Car pour y faire face il lui faudrait sacrifier son soutien à l'oligarchie qui exploite et opprime le peuple russe. A défaut celui-ci laissera faire.

Les exemples de la Géorgie et de l'Ukraine illustrent le drame. Par le soutien que le pouvoir russe apportait à ceux des autocrates locaux qu'il considérait comme « ses amis », Moscou a transformé en héros des individus qui ne sont que de vulgaires agents de l'étranger !

Depuis trente ans les Etats-Unis et l'Europe bénéficient du mépris dans lequel les pouvoirs hérités du soviétisme tiennent la démocratie et, de ce fait, jouent sur du velours. C'est ainsi que Walesa, l'ami de Washington et du Pape, s'est fait passer pour le dirigeant d'un mouvement de « rénovation de la classe ouvrière » (c'est ainsi que Solidarnosc a été présenté) alors que son projet véritable était de détruire la capacité de celle-ci de résister aux assauts du capitalisme. Les aspirations démocratiques légitimes des peuples de l'Est sont ainsi manipulées et dévoyées avec d'autant plus de facilité que les gauches majoritaires de l'Europe se font complices du projet de l'impérialisme dominant. Ce faisant elles n'aident pas à la reconstruction nécessaire d'une gauche post soviétique, mais tout au contraire, contribuent à perpétuer la confusion.

The geometry of the geopolitics of the features of possible alliances between the United States, Europe and Russia will weigh heavily on the determination of future globalisation. Two configurations are possible here: the first commanded by a possible privileged Euro-Russian partnership and the second illustrated by the consolidation of "Russian-American alliance" based on the choice of Russia to become a major exporter of oil to the United States. The "common fight against terrorism" has, since the 11th September 2001, apparently consolidated this alliance. The facts amply demonstrate that we are dealing with a completely dissymmetrical partnership which is nothing other than the implementation of the Washington plan to destroy Russia. Far from providing Russia with the means to modernise its production system, this partnership is closely linked with the interests of the Russian oligarchy and its submission to the project of the transformation of Russia exclusively into a supplier of raw materials. Furthermore, it has facilitated the penetration of the United States into Caucasia and central Asia from where Moscow is currently being ousted. This configuration cannot therefore constitute an element of the construction of an alternative globalisation.

Perhaps the second configuration can. A Euro-Russian partnership could be devised from a different perspective if it did not limit itself to favouring the export of Russian oil to Europe but were accompanied by Europe's active support for the modernisation of the whole of the Russian production

system. Europe could have taken the initiative since 1990 and proposed a partnership capable of reinforcing the autonomy of the two partners vis-à-vis the United States. Europe, apprehensive as usual, did not do this, afraid of clashing with Washington, thus opening the way for the United States offensive directed at Moscow. Russian oil is therefore destined first and foremost to meet American needs and is sold in dollars. A partnership that could have planned its sales giving priority to Europe and in euros would have significantly reduced European dependence on suppliers largely controlled by Washington whether we are talking about the Middle East, the Caspian Sea or the Guinean Gulf. Europe has therefore accepted this extremely unequal division of the remains of the former Soviet world: Russia and central Asia for the United States, Poland and the Baltic states for the Europeans!

It is not too late to consider reversing Russia's alliances. Opposition to the oligarchy's monopoly of power is gaining ground in Russia. Diplomatic setbacks both in Russia and Europe in the light of Washington's offensive should end up making people think. A rapprochement between the large partners of Eurasia (Europe, Russia, China and India) involving the rest of the old world (Africa in particular) is necessary, possible and would put an end to Washington's plans to extend the Monroe doctrine to the entire planet once and for all. We must head in this direction, with patience certainly, but above all with determination.