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The North/South conflict remains central in the socialist perspective

The capitalism of the generalized, financialized and globalized oligopolies has thus become an 'obsolete' system, in the sense that the socialization of the oligopolies, that is the abolition of their private status, should now become the essential strategic objective in any genuine critical analysis of the real world. If this does not happen the system by itself can only produce more and more barbaric and criminal destruction – even the destruction of the planet itself. It will certainly mean the destruction of the societies in the peripheries: those in the so-called 'emerging countries as well as in the 'marginalized' countries. Under capitalism the process of global polarization makes it impossible for the peripheries "catching up" with the center, compelling them to move ahead on the long road to global socialism. Therefore the N/S conflict cannot be dissociated from the conflict between capitalism and socialism.

The obsolete character of the system as it has reached the present stage of its evolution is itself inseparable from changes in the structures of the governing classes ('bourgeoisies'), political practice, ideology and political culture. The historical bourgeoisie is disappearing from the scene and is now being replaced by the plutocracy of the 'bosses' of the oligopolies. The drift in the practice of a democracy emptied of all content and the emergence of ideological expressions that are ultra reactionary are the necessary accompaniment of the obsolete character of contemporary capitalism.

The domination of the oligopolies is exercised in the central imperialist Triad in different conditions and by different means than those used in the countries of the peripheries of the system. It is a decisive difference, essential for identifying the differences which separate the nature and the functions of the State in the peripheries from those in the center. Emerging peripheries cannot become neither "new imperialisms" nor even "sub imperialisms".

The collective imperialist Triad brings together the United States and its external provinces (Canada and Australia), Western and Central Europe, and Japan. The globalized monopolies are all products of the concentration of the national capital in the countries that constitute the Triad. The countries of Eastern Europe, even those that now belong to the European Union, do not even have their own 'national' oligopolies and thus represent just a field of expansion for the oligopolies of Western Europe (particularly Germany). They are therefore reduced to the status of the periphery. Their lopsided relationship to Western Europe is, *mutatis mutandis*, analogous to that which links Latin America to the United States (and, incidentally, to Western Europe and Japan).

In the Triad, the oligopolies occupy the whole scene in economic decision-making. Their domination is exercised directly on all the huge companies producing goods and services, like the financial institutions (banks and others) that stem from their power. And it is exercised indirectly on all the small and medium businesses (in agriculture as in other fields of production), which are reduced to the status of sub-contractors, continually subordinated to the constraints that the oligopolies impose on them at all stages of their activities.

Not only do the oligopolies dominate the economic life of the countries of the Triad. They monopolize political power for their own advantage, the electoral political parties (right and left) having become their debtors. This situation is, for the foreseeable future, accepted as being

'legitimate', in spite of the degradation of democracy that it involves. It will not be threatened until, sometime in the future perhaps, 'anti-plutocracy fronts' are able to include on their agenda the abolition of the private management of oligopolies and their socialization, in complex and openly evolving forms.

Oligopolies exercise their power in the peripheries in completely different ways. It is true that outright delocalization and the expanding practice of subcontracting have given the oligopolies of the Triad some power to intervene direct into the economic life of the various countries. But they still remain independent countries dominated by local governing classes through which the oligopolies of the Triad are forced to operate. There are all kinds of formulas governing their relationships, ranging from the direct submission of the local governing classes in the 'compradorized' ('re-colonized') countries, above all in the 'marginalized' peripheries (particularly, but not only Africa) to sometimes difficult negotiations (with obligatory, mutual concessions) with the governing classes, especially in the 'emerging' countries – above all, China.

There are also oligopolies in the countries of the South. These were the large public bodies in the former systems of actually existing socialism (in China, of course as in the Soviet Union, but also at a more modest level in Cuba and Vietnam). Such was also the case in India, Brazil and other parts of the 'capitalist South'; some of these oligopolies had a public or semi-public status, while others were private. As the globalization process deepened, certain oligopolies (public and private) began to operate outside their borders and take over the methods used by the oligopolies of the Triad. Nevertheless, the interventions of the oligopolies of the South outside their frontiers are – and will remain for a long time – marginal, compared with those of the North. Furthermore, the oligopolies of the South have not captured the political power in their respective countries for their own exclusive profit. In China the 'statocracy' of the Party-State still constitutes the essential core of power. In Russia, the mixture of State/private oligarchies has returned the autonomous power to the State that it had lost for a while after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In India, Brazil and other countries of the South, the weight of the private oligarchy is not exclusive: power rests on broader, hegemonic blocs, including mainly the national bourgeoisie, the middle classes, the owners of modernized large estates (latifundia) and rich peasants.

All these conditions make it impossible to confuse the State in the Triad countries (which functions for the exclusive use of the oligarchy and is still legitimate) and the State in the peripheries. The latter never had the same legitimacy as it has in the centres and it may very well lose what little it goes have. Those in power are in fact fragile and vulnerable to social and political struggles.

The hypothesis is unquestionably mistaken – even for the 'emerging countries' – that this vulnerability will be 'transitory' and likely to attenuate with the development of local capitalism, itself integrated into globalization, which derives from the linear vision of 'stages of development' (formulated by Rostow in 1960). But conventional thought and vulgar economics are not intellectually equipped to understand that 'catching up' in the system is impossible and that the gap between the centres and the peripheries will not 'gradually' disappear.

The oligopolies and the political powers that serve them in the countries of the Triad continue their sole aim of 'emerging from the financial crisis' and basically restoring the system as it was. There are good reasons to believe that this restoration – if it succeeds, which is not impossible, although more difficult than is generally thought – cannot be sustainable, because it involves returning to the expansion of finance, which is essential for the oligopolies if they are to appropriate monopoly rent for their own benefit. A new financial collapse, still more sensational than that of 2008, is therefore probable. But these considerations apart the restoration of the system, with the aim of allowing the expansion of the activities of the oligopolies to be resumed, would mean increasing the accumulation process by dispossessing the peoples of the South (through seizure of their natural resources, including their agricultural land). And the ecologists' discourses on 'sustainable development' will not prevail over the logic of the expansion of the oligopolies, that are more than capable of appearing to 'adopt' them in their rhetoric – as we are already seeing.

The main victims of this restoration will be the nations of the South, both the 'emerging' countries and the others. So it is very likely that the 'North/South' conflicts are destined to become much greater in the future. The responses that the 'South' will give to these challenges could thus be pivotal in challenging the whole globalized system. This may not mean questioning 'capitalism' immediately, but it would surely mean questioning the globalization commanded by the dominating oligopolies.

The responses of the South must indeed focus on helping to arm their peoples and States to face the aggression of the oligopolies of the Triad, to facilitate their 'delinking' from the existing globalization system and to promote alternatives of multiple South/South cooperation. That is exactly what happened during the Bandung era, even if in conditions different from the present ones. I refer here to my paper published in *Chemchemi* (The second awakening of the Global South)

Challenging the private status of the oligopolies by the peoples of the North themselves (the 'anti-plutocracy front') is certainly an absolutely strategic objective in the struggle for the emancipation of workers and peoples. But this objective has yet to become politically mature and it is not very likely to happen in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, the North/South conflicts will probably move to centre stage.

Defeating military control of the planet by imperialists

To maintain their monopoly guaranteed rent, oligopolies cannot content themselves with draining their own "national economies" alone. Given their global dimension, they can even drain more from the economies of dominated, emerging and marginalised peripheries. Looting the resources of the whole planet and worker overexploitation provide the material for imperialist guaranteed rent, which in turn, constitutes the condition for a social consensus that has then become possible in the opulent societies of the North. The real challenge confronting the peoples is therefore first and foremost the militarisation of globalisation. "*Empire of chaos*", as I have been describing the system since 1991 and permanent war against the peoples of the South are synonymous. This is why defeating the triad armed forces, forcing the United States to abandon their bases deployed on all continents, dismantling NATO must become the primary strategic objectives of democratic progressive forces in both North and South.

This is probably the objective pursued by the "Shanghai Group" which has engaged in reviving the spirit of "Non-alignment" to be defined now as "non-alignment with imperialist globalisation and the triad political and military project". It is therefore no pure accident if the CIA, in its report on "the world in 2025" (see my comments in the May 2010 issue of *Monthly Review*) basically focuses on that Group which it considers – rightly – as the "major enemy".

Democracy associated with social progress

By choosing democracy as the battlefield to launch their offensive which primarily aimed at dismantling the Soviet Union and re-conquering East European countries, the *Atlantic Alliance* diplomacy had a stroke of genius. This idea had been floated since the 1970s and soon materialised with the creation of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe – Abbreviation CSCE – and signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. In a book with a telling title by Jacques Andreani, (*Le Piège, Helsinki et la chute du communisme*; Odile Jacob 2005), the author explained how, following the agreement, the Soviets who expected NATO disarmament and real *détente*, were simply duped by their Western partners. It is noteworthy that the Atlantic Alliance countries' "democratic" discourse is something relatively recent. Originally, did NATO not quite accommodate itself to Salazar, the Turkish generals and the

Greek colonels? In the meantime, triad diplomacies lent their support to (and often installed) the worst dictatorships ever in South America, Africa and Asia.

This discourse on democracy gradually replaced the one supported by the Soviets and their allies: 'pacific coexistence', associated with 'respect' for the political practices of both parties and for 'non interference' in their internal affairs. The coexistence discourse had had its important moments. For example, the Stockholm Appeal in the 1950s, reminded people of the real nuclear threat implied by the aggressive diplomacy employed by the United States since the Potsdam Conference (1945), reinforced by the atomic bombing of Japan just a few days after the conference. However, at the same time the choice of this strategy (coexistence and non-interference) was convenient – or could be convenient, according to circumstances – to the dominant powers in both West and East. For it enabled the realities of the respective descriptions, 'capitalist' and 'socialist', to be taken for granted by the countries of both West and East. It eliminated all serious discussion about the precise nature of the two systems: that is, from examining the actually existing capitalism of our era (oligopoly capitalism) and actually existing socialism. At first the new democratic discourse was adopted with much reticence. Many of the main political authorities of the Atlantic alliance saw the inconveniences that could upset their preferred 'realpolitik'. It was not until Carter was President of the United States (rather like Obama today) that the 'moral' sermon conveyed by democracy was understood. It was Mitterand in France who broke with the Gaullist tradition of refusing the 'division' imposed on Europe by the cold war strategy promoted by the United States. Later, the experience of Gorbachev in the USSR made it clear that rallying to this discourse was a guarantee for catastrophe. The new 'democratic' discourse thus bore its fruits. It seemed sufficiently convincing for 'leftwing' opinion in Europe to support it. This was so, not only for the electoral left (the socialist parties) but also those with a more radical tradition, of which the communist parties were the heir. With 'eurocommunism' the consensus became general.

Drawing the lessons from this victory, the ruling classes of imperialist triad have decided to pursue the strategy of centre-staging the debate on "democracy". China has not been criticised for opening up its economy, but because its political management has been monopolised by the communist party. Cuba's achievements which have no match across South America have been ignored, putting the focus instead, time and again, on its one-party-system.

Has this strategy been really aimed at making democracy prevail? The answer is clearly "no", unless you are naive. The single and only objective is to force resisting countries to accept a "market economy" open and integrated in the so-called liberal but actually imperialist global system and to reduce them to the state of dominated peripheries in the system. Once achieved, this objective prevents the advancement of democracy in the victimised countries concerned and cannot, in any way, enhance the response to the "democracy issue". Incidentally, the "democracy" theme has been invoked only against countries resisting globalized liberal overture. The others have been less criticised for their clearly autocratic political management. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are perfect illustrations. But Georgia (pro-Atlantic Alliance) can also be cited and many others as well.

At best, the proposed "democratic" formula is no more than a caricature of an "electoral multiparty system" deprived of concerns for social progress but again and always – or almost always - associated with the type of social regression required and produced by dominant really existing capitalism (oligopolistic capitalism). The formula has already done a lot of damage to the credibility of democracy because peoples in disarray have given up and prefer instead to believe in backward-looking religious and ethnicity illusions.

As it appears, it is now necessary more than ever to step up *radical* criticism. I mean the type of criticism which associates rather than dissociates the democratisation of societies (and not

only their practice of political management) with social progress (in a socialist perspective). This criticism cannot dissociate the struggle for democratisation from the struggle for socialism. There can be no socialism without democracy and neither can there be democratic progress outside a socialist prospect.

The chances of democratic progress in the countries that practised ‘actually existing socialism’, as well as in Asia and Africa in the Bandung era, would have been much greater, in the medium term if not immediately. The dialectics of social struggles would have been left to develop on their own, opening up the possibility of outstripping the limits of ‘actually existing socialisms’ (which had, moreover, been deformed by a partial adherence to the opening of the liberal economy) to reach the ‘end of the tunnel’.

An authentic democracy is indissociable with social progress. This means it must associate the requirements of liberty and the nonetheless important ones of equality. Now those two values are not spontaneously necessarily complementary but often conflicting. Liberty, associated with ownership on the same footing, sanctified by the economic system, reduces the space of materialisation of the claims to equality, as ownership is necessarily the one of a minority, as well as being always unequally distributed. In our present times, the one of the dominant big financial oligopolies, that extreme inequality and the combine liberty/ownership association enforce the true power of a plutocracy, and reduce democracy to the practise of rites without impact. In counterpoint, equality (to the least a certain degree of lesser inequality) can be – and has often been in contemporary history – guaranteed by the power, without much tolerance for the exercise of citizenship liberties.

Combining liberty and equality is the essence of the challenge facing contemporary peoples.

The institutional democracy the dominant ideology proposes us constitutes an obstacle to authentic democratic progress. The advances of democracy have always been produced by popular struggles, and those advances were more marked in revolutionary periods. The dominant ideology associates “democracy” and “market freedom” (i.e., capitalism in fact) and pretends they are indissociable: no democracy without market; so no conceivable democratic socialism. This is here but a tautological ideological formulation – in the vulgar and negative meaning of the term – which supposes reduction of the concept of democracy to the truncated one of the United States. As a fact, the history of actually existing capitalism shows that even that truncated democracy has never been completely endorsed by the peoples.

In the centres of capitalism, the advances of representative democracy have always been the outcome of popular struggles, contained as long as was possible by the tenants of power (the owners). At the scale of the system of global capitalism – the true unit in which the development of capitalism moves – the (truncated) democracy/capitalism association is still more visibly without real foundations. In the peripheries integrated in real global capitalism, democracy has never – or almost – been in the agenda of the possible or even thought after for the functioning of capitalist accumulation. Under these conditions, I will even go as far as saying that democratic advances in the centres, if they have indeed been the outcome of the struggles of the concerned popular classes, have nonetheless been largely facilitated by the advantages of the societies under consideration within the global system. Marx expected important positive effects from universal suffrage: the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism. History has not proved his expectations true because universal suffrage operated in these instances in societies plagued by nationalist/imperialist ideology and the true advantages attached to it (cf. Luciano Canfora, *La démocratie, histoire d'une idéologie*, Seuil 2006).

Popular movements and peoples in struggle for socialism and liberation from imperialist domination have been at the origin of authentic democratic advances, inventing a theory and a practise which associate democracy and social progress. That evolution – superior to capitalism, its ideology and its narrow practise of representative and procedural democracy – was initiated very early, as early as the French Revolution. It expressed itself in a more mature and more radical manner in subsequent

revolutions, during the Commune of Paris, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution and some others (the one of Mexico, Cuba, and Vietnam), as well as in Asia and Africa in the Bandung era.

The Russian Revolution initiates the great reforms which determine a possible socialist and democratic evolution: land reform, expropriation of capitalists. State control drift will occur later. But it is undoubtedly the Chinese which had enacted the principles of a “popular democracy” (nothing to do with the practice of Eastern Europe “popular democracies”) holder of true social and democratic advances, defining a phase of the long transition to democratic socialism. Abolition of private ownership of land and guarantee of equal access to it by all were its major axis. Setting in place of Communes as collective managers of agricultural production, of small industrial units associated with public services (schools, clinics, etc.) could serve as an efficient institutional framework to progressive democratisation in the management of all aspects of social life. The limitations, inconsistencies and regressions of the Chinese popular democracy have multiple causes, well analysed by Lin Chun (*The transformation of Chinese socialism*, Duke U. Press 2006): the objective contradiction which oppose the three necessary poles of a long-term transition project (national independence, development of the productive forces, progress of the values of equality and socialism), but also – and not less important – absence of the formulation of formal legal guarantees of the rights of the individual and imprecise institutionalisation of the powers. The “mass line” which invites the popular classes formulating their claims, gives them the means to do so, and does not institutionalise the party as a self-proclaimed vanguard which “teaches” the people a truth of which it has the monopoly of the knowledge without having to “learn” from the people, stems indeed from a democratic project. That principle is at the Jericho sides of the thesis according to which theory is brought from outside the movement. The “mass line” does not constitute however a substitute to the institutionalisation of the rights and the organisations.

I am not among people who abstain from severely criticising the authoritarian drifts, if not bloody, which accompanied the revolutionary periods of history. Explaining the reasons underlying them does not justify them and does not reduce their destructive dimension as regards the socialist future they conveyed. Still is it necessary to remind that the bloodiest violence has always been the one exercised by counter revolutions. The bloody drifts of Stalinism are not the product of the logic of socialism but the will to stop its progression and substitute it a state control which I qualify as a “capitalism without capitalists”. Still, is there need to remind of the permanent crimes of actually existing capitalism/imperialism, the colonial massacres, the ones associated with “preventive wars” waged in present day by the United States and their allies? Under such conditions, “democracy” when it is not simply barred from the agenda is no more than a masquerade as we see it in Iraq.

Democracy, today in regression around the world can only make progress provided it takes the forms of an institutionalised democracy associated with social progress, not dissociated from it. Everywhere, even in very different conditions according to whether we are in the centres or the peripheries of contemporary globalised capitalism, the challenge is the same: going beyond both capitalism and representative democracy, in other words, adopting radical positions in those two indissociable directions constitutes the condition of democratic progress.

I will then enumerate some possible general propositions which will enable progress in that direction:

(i) Adoption of charters of rights (national and international charters, specific charters relating to defined areas such as the rights of women, peasants, workers’ organisations, the management of public services, of state-owned and private enterprise, etc.) which dare challenge the sacrosanct dimension of ownership, assert primacy of the values which associate liberty and equality, development and social progress; and of course the formulation of necessary means for those charters not to remain in a state of lip service.

(ii) Reinforcement of the powers of elected parliaments, adoption of the principle of the proportional voting system, abolition of presidential systems should be given high priority in the programmes of a political left-wing dedicated to giving back democracy its lost meaning.

(iii) Opening up of spaces of popular and democratic management in all areas of social services, production units, municipal management and the conduct of struggles to make their legitimacy acknowledged by the authorities.

(iv) Rehabilitate full respect of the nations' sovereignty, knowing there can be no "supranational democracy" if democratic aspirations are violated at the level of States (which is the case in the European Union). Sacrificing possible progress of the more advanced peoples in their struggles in the name of a "long-term" advantage, which ever one, within big regional blocks is not acceptable because achievement of actual advances in one or many countries can have bandwagon effect on the others, whereas alignment on the "requirements" of the regional union is almost always alignment on the least advanced. Operating that choice is in fact making prevail the dominant interest for which "the global opening up" of markets is of a decisive importance over the ones of the popular classes.

The challenges facing a radical programme of the proposed model are certainly considerable. Beyond the variety of concrete situations, we can identify three sets of major difficulties:

- In the countries of the periphery the challenge can only be won if for a long period of transition (of secular type) the political systems of popular democracy succeed in combining three objectives: safeguard and reinforcement of national independence in an international multi-polar system based on a negotiated globalisation, unavoidable acceleration of the development of productive forces without which it is vain to speak about poverty eradication and the construction of a balanced multi-polar world, assertion of the growing place of socialism and equality in particular. That challenge concerns three quarters of humanity. But if meeting it determines parallel progression of the democratisation of society, in reverse and complementary sense, it seems to me difficult in present times to reach a development worthy of that name (i.e., accelerated, social, if not socialist, reinforcing national independence) by means of "enlightened despotism". No doubt an enlightened autocracy of that kind would be better than obscurantist despotisms, little annoying for imperialism, no doubt there may still exist situations for which we cannot hope much better in the short-term. It seems to me evident however that, what can be obtained in that non democratic political context will rapidly bump into impassable limits.

- Democracy is not a recipe one just needs to adopt. Its construction is an endless process, which makes me prefer the term of democratisation. In fact, that recipe – the multi party system and elections – not only confines into the option of a truncated representative and procedural democracy, reserved to the sole area of the management of political life, and owing to that, perfectly anti-popular in our time of senile capitalism, but also, being associated to economic liberalism, turns into a farcical joke. The recipe deprives of its legitimacy the struggle for democracy. Accepting that solution as "less bad", confines into a demoralising deadlock, and discourses on "good governance" and "poverty reduction" bring no responses to the destructive effects of liberalism.

It finally seems to me useful to signal the important options to discuss with regards to the methods of struggle capable of successfully advancing in the directions indicated here. That debate is of direct concern for the "movements" of the social Forums.

The present time is characterised by extreme diversity of all natures of social movements of protest and struggle against the devastating effects of the deployment of the dominant strategies in place. But it is as much characterised by great mistrust towards the forms of organisation and struggle of the historic left-wing of the XIXth and XXth centuries, towards their spontaneous propensity of proclaiming themselves as "vanguards" (a term largely rejected today owing to that), and, in response of affirming their identity through methods which often indeed respect the principles of democracy. Those criticisms are largely based on a pertinent critical analysis of what the struggles of the two last centuries were. They must then be seriously taken and inspire creative invention of new forms of organisation and action.

In response to that challenge, many “movements” and militants accept propositions I believe extremely dangerous. Among these I will at least mention:

(i) The discourse on “civil society”: beyond the conceptual blur, what is meant by that term is largely inspired from a model that praises a-politism (and in particular rejection of the parties politics) to the benefit of pretended proximity, grassroots, immediately “useful” action (in reality then without actual capacity of challenging systems of powers seen to be too powerful to be defeated). The method encourages negative evolutions, perpetuating the fragmentation of the movement, if not their transformation into defence “lobbies” for particular interests to the detriment of the general interest. The United States tradition of which Negri revives the appraisal largely inspires the discourse on the “multitude”. It finds its ideological foundation on the over promotion of the “individual”, who is perceived as having become the historic actor of transformation, a role classes and nations would no longer fulfil. That ideology suits the minorities of the opulent West – over represented in the social Forums - , it does not respond to the expectations of the immense masses of the popular classes.

(ii) The communitarianist discourse: a product almost inevitably born from the diversifying of the “origins” of the components of the popular classes (itself produced by the migrations of the past half century). Largely associated with the weakness of the expressions of the class and citizenship consciousness, the communitarianist ideology, far from promoting maturation of the mentioned forms of consciousness, perpetuates their under development. Here again the tradition which comes from the United States, where it has precisely fulfilled that function of obstacle for the maturation of political class consciousness, is today in great vogue in Europe.

The “movements”’ stagnation, trapped by methods and discourses criticised here, the very limited (often insignificant) successes of the struggles in which they engage, encourages in turn alignment to the thesis of the “less bad choice” to avoid the “worse”. But that choice, knowing the less bad is often little different from the worse, has only one impact: demoralising the popular classes.

In counterpoint, I will make the following propositions:

(i) Organising the convergence within diversity: this implies of course respect of divergence (including independence of the organisations) but also research for platforms for actions in common, capable of promoting convergence. This implies accepting that definition of strategies of action, short-term objectives and longer-term perspectives must be at the centre of the debates; a task to which the World Forum of Alternatives wishes to contribute.

(ii) Rejection of a-politism: reminding that all movements, all struggles are by nature political actions, and that consequently, associating political parties (or, from lack of that, segments of those parties and actors openly present on the grounds of “politics”) must not be rejected but sought for.

(iii) The challenge for all movements, small or large size, as for all revolutionary or reformist political parties are of a same nature: it consists in giving priority to the logic of struggle over the ones of organisation. The last mentioned logic favours timidity, alignment on the “less bad”. The mentioned promote radicalisation of struggles, their will to get to triumph.

‘The environment’, or the socialist perspective of use value? The ecological question and so-called sustainable development

Here again, one has to start with the real problem: continuous capitalist accumulation would lead to the destruction of our natural environment and ultimately life on the planet.

Capture of ecology by vulgar ideology operates on two levels: on the one hand by reducing measurement of use value to an “improved” measurement of exchange value, and on the other

by integrating the ecological challenge with the ideology of “consensus”. Both these manoeuvres undermine the clear realisation that ecology and capitalism are, by their nature, in opposition. The “ecological costs” are, in this way of thinking, assimilated to external economies. The vulgar method of measuring cost/benefit in terms of exchange value (itself conflated with market price) is then used to define a “fair price” integrating external economies and diseconomies. And Bob’s your uncle. In fact, as can already be seen, oligopolies have seized hold of ecology to justify the opening up of new fields to their destructive expansion. The capture of ecological discourse by the political culture of the consensus (a necessary expression of the conception of capitalism as the end of history) has an easy ride. For it is responding to the alienation and illusion which feed the dominant culture, that of capitalism. An easy ride because this culture is actual, and holds a dominant place in the minds of the majority of human beings, in the South as well as in the North. In contrast, the expression of the demands of the socialist counter-culture is fraught with difficulty. Because socialist culture is not there in front of our eyes. It is part of a future to be invented, a project of civilisation, open to the creativity of the imagination. Slogans (such as “socialisation through democracy and not through the market”) are not enough, despite their power to pave the way for the historical process of transformation. For what is at stake is a long “secular” process of societal reconstruction based on principles other than those of capitalism, in both the North and the South, which cannot be supposed to take place “rapidly”. Socialism is a higher stage of civilization. But construction of the future, however far away, begins today.

In conclusion two points should be made.

First that capitalism is per se unable to respond to the challenge simply because it is based on the exclusive logics of short sighted profit. In his time, Marx not only suspected the existence of this problem. He had already expressed it through his rigorous distinction between value and wealth, conflated in vulgar economics. Marx explicitly said that the accumulation of capital destroys the natural bases on which it is built: man (the alienated, exploited, dominated and oppressed worker) and the earth (symbol of natural riches at the disposal of humanity). And whatever might be the limitations of this way of putting it, trapped within its own era, it nonetheless remains an illustration of a clear consciousness of the problem (beyond intuition) which deserves to be recognised. It is regrettable, therefore, that the ecologists of our time have not read Marx. This would have allowed them to take their own proposals further, to grasp their revolutionary import, and, of course, to go further than Marx himself on this topic.

Second that the noise made around the need for a "global" response to the challenge is simply aiming at preventing the nations of the South to make any use – good or bad – of the resources of the planet in order to allow the North continuing its wasting pattern of production and consumption. This is unacceptable.

"Aid", an additional tool for controlling vulnerable countries

"International aid", described as something essential for the survival of “Least Developed Countries” (UN terminology to designate many African and a few other countries) is relevant here because the real objective of aid, which is destined to the most vulnerable of the peripheral countries, is to erect an additional obstacle to their joining an alternative South front.

Aid concepts have been narrowly framed; its architecture was defined in the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (2005), a document written by OECD staff and later imposed on recipient countries. The overall conditionality defined by an alignment with the principles of liberal globalisation – to open up markets, to become “attractive” to foreign private investments – is omnipresent. From this perspective, the *Paris Declaration* is a regression compared to the practices of “development decades” (1960-1970) when the principle of free choice by the South countries of their system and economic and social policies was admitted. Under such conditions, aid policies and their apparent immediate objectives are indissociable from the geopolitical objectives of imperialism. Obviously, the different regions of the Planet do not have identical functions in the globalised liberal system. It is therefore not enough to indicate whatever constitutes their common denominator (trade liberalisation, opening up to financial flows, privatisation etc.).

Sub-Saharan Africa is perfectly integrated into the global system and not at all “marginalised” as many people unfortunately too often speculate without thinking: the external trade of the region represents 45 % of its GDP, compared to 30% for Asia and South America and 15% for each of the three regions making up the triad. Quantitatively therefore Africa is “more” and not “less” integrated but in a different way (ref : *Is Africa really marginalized?*; in, Hellen Bauer, *History and Philosophy of Sciences*, Ibadan, 2003). The geo-economy of the region is based on two sets of productions which are decisive in the shaping of its structures and definition of its position in the global system: (i) “tropical” agricultural exports: coffee, cocoa, cotton, peanut, fruits, palm oil etc, (ii) hydrocarbons and mining: copper, gold, precious metals, diamond etc. The former provide the “survival” means beyond the food produced for their own consumption by farmers who are financing the State’s graft on the local economy and also the reproduction of the “middle classes” through public spending. The local ruling classes are more interested in these productions than the dominant economies. The latter are much more interested in the proceeds from the natural resources of the continent. The interest today is in hydrocarbons and rare minerals and tomorrow it may well be in reserves for the development of agro fuel, the sun (when long distance conveyance of solar energy becomes possible in the next few decades), water (when its direct or indirect export will be made possible).

The race for securing rural territories that can accommodate the expansion of agro fuels has already started in South America. From this perspective, Africa offers vast possibilities. Malagasy has ignited the movement and has already conceded large areas of lands in the western part of the country. The implementation of the Congolese Rural Code (2008) inspired by Belgian cooperation and FAO will certainly allow agribusiness to secure agrarian lands on a large scale for the purpose of “developing” them just as the Mining Code had allowed the plundering of the colony’s mineral resources in the past. The useless farmers will pay the price; their foreseeable extreme impoverishment will perhaps attract the interest of future humanitarian aid and “aid” programmes for poverty reduction! The new phase of history that has just started is characterised by sharpened conflicts for access to the natural resources of the planet. The triad intends to have exclusive access to this “useful” Africa (that of reserves of natural resources) and prevent the “emerging countries” whose needs in that area are already overwhelming and will grow bigger and bigger, from gaining access to them. The guarantee of this exclusive access requires political control and reducing vulnerable African States to the state of “client States”. It is therefore not misleading to consider that the objective of aid is to “corrupt” the ruling classes. Beyond financial levies (alas widely known though usually commented upon as if donors played no part in it!), aid discharges very well this political function having become “essential” (since it has become an important source of

budget financing). It is then necessary to conceive aid to become permanent and not to prepare for its disappearance through consistent development. Also important is the fact that this aid should not be exclusively and entirely reserved for the ruling classes, the “government”. It should also arouse the interest of the “oppositions” capable of succeeding them. At this point, the role of the so-called civil society and some NGOs becomes relevant. To be really politically efficient, the aid in question should also contribute to maintaining farmer integration into this global system, as this integration feeds an additional source of government revenue.

Poverty, civil society, good governance: the poor rhetoric of the dominant discourse

This allegedly self-assigned objective of the dominant discourse is “to reduce or even eradicate poverty” by relying on the “civil society” to replace a “bad governance” by a good one. The very term of “poverty” pertains to a language as old as the world, the language of charity which belongs to the past, not the present and to the future. It precedes the formation of a developed language by modern social thinking which seeks to be scientific that is, by discovering the mechanisms that engender an observable phenomenon. The massive literature on poverty exclusively – or almost – puts the focus on “locating” the phenomenon and quantifying it. It does not ask some upstream questions such as: what are the mechanisms that engender the poverty in question? Can they be related to fundamental rules (like competition) forming the base of our systems? And in particular, concerning the assisted South countries, the development strategies and policies designed for them?

Even taken seriously (therefore overlooking its abusive use), does the “civil society” concept has the necessary elevation that is required of a concept to kick off and be given consideration in a serious and scientific-oriented debate? As proposed to us, “the civil society” in question is associated with a consensus ideology. A double consensus: (i) that there is no alternative to the “market economy” (a gross expression by itself to serve as a substitute for the analysis of past and contemporary “really existing capitalism”); (ii) that there is no alternative to representative democracy founded on electoral multiparty system (conceived as “democracy”), to serve as a substitute for a society democratisation concept which by itself is a never-ending process.

In counterpoint, struggles in history have allowed the emergence of political cultures founded on the recognition of conflict of social and national interests, giving, inter-alia, some meaning to the terms “right” and “left” by which the right and power to imagine alternatives and not exclusively “alternations” in the exercise of power (changing names to do the same thing) is conferred on creative democracy.

”Governance” is an invention substituted for “power”. The opposition between the two adjectives – good or bad governance – is reminiscent of manichaeism and moralism substituted for reality analysis as scientific as possible. Once again, this fashion came from the USA where sermon has often dominated political discourse. “Good governance” implies that the “decision-maker” is “fair”, “objective” (retains the “best solution”), “neutral” (accepting symmetrical presentation of arguments), and on top of all “honest” (even of course in the meanest financial sense of the term). Reading the literature produced by the World Bank on the subject is like you are re-reading the grievances submitted – in general, by religious and/or law men (few women!) – to the “just despot” (not even enlightened!) in the ancient times of the Orient.

The visible ideology behind this is simply trying to overlook the real issue: what social interests does the incumbent regime whatever it may be represent and defend? How can the transformation of power be advanced such that it gradually becomes the instrument of the majorities, in particular, that of the victims of the system as it is? Given that the multiparty electoral recipe has shown its limitations on this aspect.

Post modernist discourse concludes the discourse titled by some “new spirit of capitalism”, but which should be better described as the ideology of tardy capitalism/imperialism of oligopolies. I wish to refer the reader to the book written by Nkolo Foe (*Le Post modernisme*;2009) who strongly established the perfectly functional substance aimed at serving the real interests of the dominant forces. Modernism was inaugurated by the discourse of Enlightenment in the European XVIIIth Century, in parallel with the triumph of European historical form of capitalism and imperialism the latter being consubstantial, and later conquered the world. It conveys its contradictions and limitations. The desire for universalism which it formulates is defined by the affirmation of human rights (not necessarily women’s) which in substance are those of bourgeois individualism. What is more, the real capitalism with which this form of modernity is associated is an imperialism that denies similar rights for non-European peoples conquered and submitted to the demands for producing an imperialist guaranteed income to the benefit of oligopolies. Criticism of this bourgeois and capitalist/imperialist modernity is certainly necessary. The new Reason wanted to be emancipating; and it was to the extent that it freed the society from the alienations and oppressions of the old regimes and as such constituted a guarantee for progress, more precisely a form of limited and contradictory progress because this Reason is that of a society ultimately managed by capital.

Post modernism proposes no radical criticism that would lead to the emancipation of individual and society. Instead, its proposal is to return to pre-modern and pre-capitalist alienations. So the forms of sociability it tries to promote is bound to be in keeping with “tribalist identity” membership of (Para-religious or Para-ethnic) communities at the opposite extremes of what is required to deepen democracy which has become synonymous with “tyrannizing the people” who dare question the wise management exercised by *executives* at the service of oligopolies. The criticisms levied against the “grand discourses” (Enlightenment, democracy, progress, socialism, national liberation) are not future-oriented; instead they look back at an imaginary and false past and by the way perfectly idealised. The extreme fragmentation of popular majorities has thus been facilitated, making them accept to adjust to the logic of reproducing the domination of oligopolies and imperialism. Fragmentation does not hinder domination; it even makes it easier. Far from being a conscious and lucid agent of social transformation, the individual in question is enslaved to triumphant merchandizing. The citizen gives in to being a consumer/spectator. He/she is no longer a citizen longing for emancipation; he/she has become instead a colourless being who accepts submission.

Conventional economics: an ideological instrument that is central to capitalist reproduction

The discourse of conventional economics refers to the current system as ‘the market economy’. It is inadequate, even deceptive: it could equally well describe England in the 19th century, China of the Sung and Ming dynasties and the towns of the Italian Renaissance.

The theory of the ‘market economy’ has always been the backbone of ‘vulgar economics’. This theory immediately eliminates the whole, essential reality – social relationships of production (particularly, ownership as the immediate expression of these relationships, promoted to a sacred principle). It is replaced by the hypothesis of a society constituted by ‘individuals’ (who, in the final

analysis, become active agents in the reproduction of the system and its evolution). These ‘individuals’ (homo oeconomicus) are ahistorical, identical with those who, since the origins of humanity (Robinson Crusoe) have possessed the same, unchanging qualities (egoism, the capacity to calculate and to make choices that benefit themselves). Thus building the ‘market economy’ on these foundations does not therefore represent a serious formulation of historical and real capitalism. It constructs an imaginary system into which it integrates almost nothing of the essentials of the capitalist reality.

Marx’s *Capital* unmasks the ideological nature (in the functional sense of the word) of this construction of vulgar economics since Frédéric Bastiat and Jean-Baptiste Say, of which the function has been simply to legitimize the existing social order, likening it to a ‘natural and rational order’. The later theories of value – utility and the general economic equilibrium, developed in response to Marx in the last third of the nineteenth century, as well as those of their subsequent heir, contemporary mathematicized economics, described as classic, neoclassic, liberal, neoliberal (the name does not really matter) – do not diverge from the framework defined by the basic principles of vulgar economics.

The discourse of vulgar economics helps to meet the requirements of the production and reproduction of actually existing capitalism.

It brings to the fore a eulogy of ‘competition’ above everything else, considered as the essential condition of ‘progress’. It denies this attribute to solidarity (in spite of examples from history), which is confined to a straitjacket of compassion and charity. It can be competition between ‘producers’ (i.e. capitalists, without greatly considering the oligopolistic form of contemporary capitalist production) or between ‘workers’ (which assumes that the unemployed, or the ‘poor’ are responsible for their situation). The exclusivity of ‘competition’ is reinforced by the new language (‘social partners’, instead of classes in conflict) as well as by practices – of, among others, the European Union Civil Service Tribunal, which is a fierce partisan of the dismantling of trade unions, an obstacle to competition between workers.

The adoption of the exclusive principle of competition also invites society to support the aim of building a ‘consensus’ that excludes the imaginary prospect of ‘another society’, based on solidarity. This ideology of the consensus society which is well on the way to being adopted in Europe, destroys the transformative outreach of the democratic message. It conveys the libertarian rightwing message that considers the State – of whatever stripe – as ‘the enemy of freedom’ (which should be interpreted as the enemy of the freedom of capital enterprise) while the practice of democracy is amputated from social progress.

The North-South conflict in the globalisation in crisis

Global capitalism does not call into question the opposition centre/periphery; on the contrary it accentuates its conflict.

Contemporary capitalism has reached an extreme stage of centralisation of capital ownership: three to five thousand groups, nearly all located in the countries of the Triad (United States, Europe, Japan) control, for the first time in history, all the systems of production, distribution and consumption at the scales of the nations of the Centre and, indirectly, that of the global system. These generalised monopolies centralise for their benefit an increased imperialist rent. The latter comes from multiple sources that are visible (the low wages paid in the export industries of the peripheries) or hidden behind their control of the globalised financial market, overprotection of industrial patents, their quasi-exclusive access to the natural resources of the whole planet, and lastly, the globalisation of the powerful political means at the disposal of Western powers, strengthened by their quasi monopoly over weapons of mass destruction.

Thereby, the contradiction centre/periphery, far from being alleviated by the deepening of globalisation, is accentuated.

Yet, to all appearances, the so-called emerging countries (China, India, Brazil and others) have benefited from the globalisation of the 1990s and 2000s that enabled them to accelerate their growth pace. It is those appearances that made us say – hastily – that the conflict centre/periphery is for them almost extinct (“they are catching up” in and through capitalist globalisation).

The question is to know why it has been so and whether the pursuit of this evolution is sustainable. Capitalism has entered into a long structural crisis as from the 1970s: growth rates in the countries of the Triad fell down to half their levels of the “Glorious Thirty” (1945-1975) and have never got back to those levels since then. The capital reacted to this crisis with centralisation and financialisation, which are indissociable: the flight into finance has been the sole mean for oligopolies to find a market for their increasing surpluses. Liberal globalisation crowned it all. The success of this response has created the conditions for a marked blooming from 1990 to 2008 (which I qualified as “*Belle Epoque*”). The emerging countries’ strategies of growth acceleration through prioritisation of their exports fell within that era which ensured their immediate success.

The pursuit of this globalised capitalist option is unsustainable for many reasons. The main one is that this way will not make it possible to absorb the gigantic mass of peasantries (nearly half humanity still, located for almost all in the three continents: Asia, Africa and Latin America) in a development of modern industries and services. The historic capitalist way based on private ownership of the agrarian soil and its reduction to the status of merchandise was possible only for Europe, thanks to the massive emigration permitted by the conquest of the Americas (the “Europeans” accounted for 18% of the world population in 1500; in 1900, Europeans from Europe and migrants outside of Europe represented 36%). The people for Asia and Africa, who have no such opportunity, cannot follow the same development path. In other words, while historic capitalism did solve the agrarian issue for Europe, it remains unable to do so in the peripheries.

Those among the countries in the South who would persist in this way and accept to “adjust” on a day-to-day basis to conditions that would be increasingly severe with the deepening of the crisis, will find themselves not to have built a “national capitalism” capable of dealing on equal terms with the collective imperialism of the Triad, but in the situation of countries ravaged by a *lumpen* capitalism, for all that vulnerable and thereby dominated. Imperialist powers only see in these countries “emerging markets” whose development will necessarily fall within this deplorable perspective. But the countries concerned see themselves as “emerging nations”. The difference is significant.

The nations in the South, therefore, are to lose their illusions relating to the “accelerated development in and through globalisation”. The increasing difficulties of adjustment already promote the fights of the victims – peasants for land, workmen for better wages, peoples for the conquest of democratic rights. In order to meet the challenge, the powers will have to refocus their development on the domestic market (an initiative taken by China as from 2002). This new self-centred development path – unavoidable – will remain certainly difficult. It must associate complementary but also conflicting means: the recourse to the “market” (which, in the modern world, is always a “capitalist” market) and to social planning (as little

bureaucratic as possible, paving the way, as much as possible, to the active intervention of popular classes).

The conflict between the collective imperialism of the Triad and the nations of the South is to intensify around issues relating to access to world services, technologies, and the globalised financial market. Imperialism is aware that the monopolies that ensure its rent are fragile and the countries in the South can annihilate their power; that's why its sole response consists in the deployment of the project of military control of the Planet by the armed forces of the United States and their subordinated allies in NATO. Nonetheless I submit here that within a few decades (not years!) the South will succeed in annihilating the power of the monopolies of the North. The South is already equipped to develop technologies by its own means. It can recuperate the control of its natural resources. The control of imperialist oligopolies over the globalized financial market is already breaking down and will be replaced, for sure, by "regional arrangements" which will reinforce the margin of autonomy of the peripheries in that respect.

What will the world be "after the depression"? Impossible to tell. Let us not forget that the first long depression which started in the 1870s, and to which the capital of that time had responded also with monopolisation, (colonial) globalisation and financialisation, has led – after the short bloom of the first "*Belle Epoque*" (1894-1914), to 1914-1945, *i. e.*, World War I, the Russian revolution, the 1929 crisis, Nazism, World War II, the Chinese Revolution. It is those "events" – not easily qualified as minor – that shaped the "post crisis" world, that is, the combination during the Glorious Thirty of social-democracy in the West, the really existing socialisms in the East, and the popular nationalisms of the Bandung era (1955-1980) in the South. The second crisis will call for transformations of equal scope (even if they will be "different"). The conflict centre/periphery and the conflict capitalism/perspectives that requires going beyond that one are indissociable.

Will the conflict centre/periphery mobilise all the Southern countries? This was the case in the Bandung era, despite the huge differences between the Southern countries of the time, not less marked than today. But this possibility is not certain. The emerging countries – the real periphery of contemporary capitalism – could nurture the illusion that they can, like the imperialist countries, even if it is in acute competition with them, benefit from the plundering of the resources of the devastated peripheries (a reality that was repeated in history) which are thereby particularly powerless.

What should be understood is that there is no room for an "acceptable global alternative consensus" as Stiglitz and others suggest (see my critiques of those projects on *Pambazuka* site). Therefore the South must first take independent initiatives, in order to change in its favour the balances of forces, thus compelling the center to later negotiate acceptable consensus.

Africa, a particularly vulnerable region in globalisation in crisis

Africa had been plunged in the dark night of colonisation, a brutal form of globalisation imposed by the capitalism of the monopolies in response to its first great depression in the late XIXth Century, taking over from the slave trade, itself at the root of its historical regression, as Walter Rodney showed. The national liberation movements, which finally succeeded in imposing the independence of the continent's states, then conceived a big project of African Renaissance: an ambitious project as was required, associating an accelerated development,

both agricultural and industrial, to the universalisation of education and to constructions of regional integrations falling within a pan-African perspective.

The historical blocks built by the National Liberation Movements imposed this perspective equal to the challenge. And the radical intelligentsia, in conceptualising and implementing this project, had been able to respond to the requirements of the challenge, think with audacity and think by itself. During the 1960s and 1970s, Africa has thereby made giant progress, to the extent that the new image of the continent made forget the image of desolation inherited from colonisation.

But this social progress was gradually bogged down under the combined effect of the internal contradictions whose emergence it developed, and the hostility of imperialism. The peasantries have been gradually marginalised in the historical blocks in power, to the benefit of the ruling classes – and sometimes new middle classes – whose desire is to become the absolute masters of local power, thereby having to make the degenerate forms of the State fulfil the functions of a comprador State.

A major constraint to the first achievements of independent Africa is at the origin of this drift. This has to do with the insignificance of the results in the unavoidable industrialisation, stemming from the illusions that foreign capital was able to help resolve the issue of its financing. On the other hand one has to understand that industrialisation in Africa, as part of the South, cannot restrict to "reproducing" patterns of historical capitalism. Industrialisation here has to be associated with the guaranteeing of access to land to peasantries, not associated with their accelerated expropriation. "Inventing" new patterns of industrialisation is a complex problem, which cannot be reduced to some blue prints. That process is necessarily uneasy; it associates ingredients of "copying" with tasks related to "doing something new".

These failures have created the conditions that enabled imperialism to resume the offensive in view of the recolonisation of Africa during the 1980s/90s, through the structural adjustment programmes, privatisation, the destruction of States, their submission to the diktats of "aid donor clubs", accompanied by the insipid discourses in fashion on "poverty", "good governance" and civil society.

The tragedy is that African intellectuals on the whole were duped by these discourses which presented the big project of African Renaissance as a "grandiloquent, nationalist and unrealistic" drift. Of course, one forgets to say that the countries that became "emerging" are precisely those that progressed in industrialisation in double time.

Africa today is then bound to no longer have ambition beyond its adjustment on a day-to-day basis to the requirements of the pursuit of the expansion of the capitalism of oligopolies; a way which we said could only lead to absolute disaster. In this perspective, Africa only exists for her natural resources it offers to plunder: the resources of its subsoil (hydrocarbons, gold, diamonds and even more important, rare minerals), her lands now offered to the expansion of agribusiness for new export productions (agrofuels and other).

Our project is to gather together a critical mass of intellectuals capable, beyond the analysis of the disastrous politics underway, of outlining an authentic renaissance of thinking that is audacious, independent and up to the challenge.

Towards a renewed national popular democratic alternative

Arusha's declaration laid the foundations for a national, popular, democratic power in Tanzania which represented a stage on the long road to socialism. Similar declarations have been formulated in Asia and Africa in the Bandung era. This national program was based on anti colonialism (Tanzania provided an unconditional support to the liberation movements of Southern Africa) and declared self reliance as the necessary foundation for a relevant pattern of development. It guaranteed the access to land to all peasants, the vast majority of the people, while the legitimacy generated by this principle created the conditions for continuous potential progress of an authentic democratization of the society.

These principles have later been defeated by the offensive of capital and the submission of States in African and in Asia, through so called programs of structural adjustment. To day massive expropriation of peasants to the benefit of foreign and local agri business is back on the agenda. Democracy, reduced to the blue print of pluriparty elections, is no longer associated with social progress, but with social regression. In response to these challenges the popular classes in the South have to re invent strategies laying foundations for a renewed national, popular and democratic alternative. This popular bloc has to conceive patterns of rural development and industrialisation based on access to land for all peasants as already argued in this lecture.

Such revolutionary advances on the long road to socialism have been initiated in different countries (in Latin America, in Nepal) and ought to be strengthened. I refer here in particular to analyses produced for Latin America by Rémy Herrera (*Les avancées révolutionnaires de l'Amérique Latine*) and for Nepal by myself (Nepal, a promising revolutionary advance, *Monthly Review* 2009).