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*The Issue of Democracy in the Contemporary Third World**

Samir Amin

The recent past has shown a global trend to democratization of political regimes on a scale that may well become irreversible. In the socialist countries the trend has been forced upon the powers that be; they must acknowledge and adapt to its demands or perish. In third world capitalist countries the call for democracy has not reached the same popular dimension and is frequently limited to the middle classes and segments of organized urban society—unions for example. However, even on such a narrow scale the trend signals a qualitative leap in the extent to which democratic consciousness has penetrated the political system of a great many third world countries. In the West a broad consensus embracing governments, public opinion and the media has emerged in support of this trend, particularly where it appears in the countries of the East and sometimes in the third world—in the latter instance according to the reasons of state of interested parties.

This democratic trend has appeared concomitantly with another global evolution emerging in the 1970s and more so in the 1980s: a kind of generalized offensive for the liberation of "market forces," aimed at the ideological rehabilitation of the absolute superiority of private property, legitimation of social inequalities and anti-statism of all kinds, etc. . . . Neo-liberalism—the name given to the offensive—knows no frontiers and is deemed to have worldwide validity. "Openness" (to capital and to "information"—i.e. the dominant media) is synonymous with essential progress. Established powers everywhere seem to be falling in with the trend: in the West where

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social democracy has, in practice, lined up with the supposed demands of this "rationality" of the open market; in the third world where the radical nationalist regimes all now seem prehistoric; and even in the socialist countries where entire sections of the ruling class have passed—or are in the throes of passing—from tactical retreat from their "Marxism" to revision, or abandonment, of it.

The coincidence of these two trends makes ours an era of intense confusion. The preponderant tolling of the bell, systematically drowning out all discordant voices and orchestrated by an unprecedented media campaign, sounds like a simple, unqualified, unilateral affirmation, taken to be self-evident. The "market"—a euphemism for capitalism—is regarded as the central axis of any "development," and such development is seen as part of an "ineluctable worldwide expansion." The desirability of total openness to the forces governing worldwide evolution and simultaneous adoption of an internal system based on the "market" are taken to be self-evident. Democratization is considered the necessary and natural product of submission to the rationality of the worldwide market. A simple dual equation is deduced from this logic: capitalism=democracy, democracy=capitalism. By the same token, socialism is pronounced dead (and Marx of course along with it); its failure is complete, it has proven synonymous with inefficiency and autocracy. Similarly, "national liberation" is proclaimed obsolete; "nationalism" is accused of necessarily engendering a fatal backwardness in the sphere of international competition. These unilateral propositions, simple to the point of being simplistic, and without scientific or historical foundations, seems to confuse even the ranks of those who in the socialist countries and the third world fight for democratization and social progress.

Three issues are worth examination in formulating a response to the questions raised by the democratic movement operating in the context of the capitalist offensive: (1) the character of the new stage of capitalist transnationalization—the issue here being whether openness to the exterior has in fact become "ineluctable"; (2) the crisis of really existing capitalism—the issue here being whether the crisis calls Marxism and socialism into question; (3) finally, the various aspects of the relationship between democracy and social progress under contemporary third world conditions.

The internal logic of the argument suggests tackling the three issues in that order, as the response to the first has implications for the others. This paper deals with the issue of democracy in the

contemporary third world and I shall make only brief mention of preliminary matters expanded elsewhere. I shall signal only such of my conclusions as must be spelled out to situate my argument on the matter directly at hand.

If the third world countries have almost never seen their political systems develop in a genuinely democratic manner (on the lines of the developed capitalist countries of the West—since 1945 at least) this is neither an accident nor a holdover from their "traditional culture." Democracy here is incompatible with the demands of capitalist expansion. What I call "really existing capitalism," that is, capitalism as a world system and not as a mode of production taken at its highest level of abstraction, has to date always generated polarization on a world scale (the "center/periphery" contradiction). This dimension has been underestimated by Marx and Marxism, and has brought to the forefront of the historical stage not "socialist" revolutions led by the working classes of the developed capitalist countries but "anti-capitalist" revolutions provoked by the polarization inherent in worldwide capitalist expansion, with socially intolerable consequences for the peoples of the peripheries and semi-peripheries of the system.

The strategic aims of these revolutions entail delinking from the logic of worldwide capitalist expansion. Implementation of these aims supposes power based on "national and popular" social hegemony (and not the "dictatorship of the proletariat" envisaged in the Marxist tradition) that acknowledges a conflictual mix of aspirations of both a socialist and a capitalist sort. The process of achieving these aims entails in turn gradual and continual democratization of society through practical management of power and of the economy.

Regimes that emerged from so-called socialist revolutions (USSR, China etc.) began to create the necessary conditions to eradicate the legacy of peripheralization produced by capitalism, by abandoning criteria of capitalist rationality and proceeding to internal social revolutions that had tremendous impact. The national liberation struggles, arising from a similar rejection of capitalist peripheralization, have not led to such significant advances, either in delinking or in internal social transformation. The societies emerging from these struggles in the third world have so far remained subject to the law of capitalist polarization. National and popular revolution and delinking are still the strategic aims of the fight for progress of the peoples on the periphery of the world capitalist system. Progress in

this regard in the so-called socialist countries of the East as in those of the South (the capitalist third world) largely determines not only the future of socialism on a world scale, but even social progress pure and simple for the majority of humankind.

The central proposition I have sketched here would be invalid in the event that either (1) the new forms of transnationalization had rendered the national and popular strategies and concomitant delinking obsolete and made feasible a single path of development: the capitalist path within worldwide openness; and/or (2) the fundamental propositions of socialism (and of Marxism in particular) concerning the historical limits of capitalism and the forms of democracy developed on its basis were without scientific foundation, their utopianism being confirmed by the failure of their implementation in the socialist experiences.

One should not underestimate the extent to which worldwide expansion has entered a more intense phase, marked by qualitatively new characteristics, of which I would mention at least the following six: (1) replacement of national systems of production (founded on the logic of social agreements produced by national history) by a worldwide system of production that challenges these agreements; (2) the worldwide spread of finance capital; (3) the new technological revolution; (4) a worldwide culture produced by intensified communications; (5) the availability of weapons with a destructive power that forces a change in traditional diplomacy; and (6) ecological interdependence, on an increasingly global scale.

Does this mean that the new factors necessitate unilateral submission to unification of the world by the "market"? Does this mean that the polarizing impact of capitalist expansion could be neutralized within the framework of national strategies willing to accept such submission?

I have found it necessary to base my response to these questions on an analysis of the effects these developments have on the global structure of the labor force. From this angle the first three developments cited combine to hasten the formation of a passive reserve army of labor exploited by worldwide capital, especially in the industrializing peripheries. Far from attenuating the polarization inherent in actually existing capitalism, the new phase of worldwide expansion can only heighten the contrasts through which it is expressed. Moreover, the military, diplomatic and cultural evolutions cited help shift the mechanisms through which the polarization

operates from the field of economic relations *stricto sensu* to the broader one of politics.

As a corollary, I have also concluded that strategies of surrender to these identifiable "worldwide constraints" will lead to catastrophe. The alternative of a "national and popular" response not only has no rival but is even more essential now than in the past. The forms it will take have still to be defined, although its broad outlines can already be perceived. In this perspective, the reconstruction of a polycentric world system seems to me a realistic option (insofar as it is feasible in the fairly short term), and the only one capable of restoring the necessary scope for autonomy to permit the social progress of all the partners.

The crisis of the socialist bloc societies is invoked in order to conclude that socialism is utopian, that capitalism represents an ageless reality, and that the Marxist critique of capitalism is erroneous. These confused notions, when subtly deployed, make it possible to sell the West's strategy, based on the equation market=democracy.

But this equation in no way holds. Bourgeois democracy is the product of the revolution that dethroned "tributary metaphysics." It establishes "equal rights" and personal liberties, but not "equality" (except under the law). As late as the latter half of the 19th century, the labor movement could enforce unqualified political democracy and win social rights, but in the framework of a compromise based on acceptance of capitalist economic management, a compromise itself made possible by global polarization to the benefit of the industrial center. Western democracy is thereby restricted to the political domain, while economic management continues to be based on non-democratic principles of private ownership and competition. In other words, the capitalist mode of production does not of itself require democracy but rather its characteristic oppression is hidden in economic alienation affecting the entire society. By contrast, the socialist project of a classless society freed of economic alienation implies a democratic structure. Once capitalist reliance on competition is broken, social relations based on cooperation among workers, and no longer on their subjection, are inconceivable without a full flowering of democracy.

The crisis of the socialist bloc societies does not invalidate these fundamental propositions, for the good reason that it is not a crisis of genuinely socialist societies, but of societies committed to a national

and popular order based on a revolutionary refusal to surrender to the dictates of capitalist peripheralization.

These societies currently have several sets of options that can be briefly indicated as follows:

(1) Evolution towards bourgeois democracy or progress beyond it through the strengthening of the social power of workers in the management of the economy.

(2) Restoration of an out-and-out "market economy" or effective progress by way of a carefully controlled use of market forces through democratic planning.

(3) An unguarded door wide open to the exterior or guarded relations with the surrounding capitalist world, albeit on the basis of increased trade.

The theoretical debate and political disputes reverberating through the socialist bloc countries are confused in part because ideological labelling as "socialist" has obscured the genuinely "national and popular" character of the historical revolutions establishing each of the regimes. But more pertinent is the fact that the conflictual forces of capitalism and socialism are meeting within genuine struggles. The forces anxious to "restore capitalism" propose total acceptance of the "market" (as a springboard for the restoration of private ownership) and of "an open door to the exterior," with or without democracy (in the Western sense of the word) according to the tactical requirements of their project. If the socialist forces dither in their resistance to the project, and if they find it difficult to articulate a coherent alternative (on the lines sketched above), it is because the lack of democratic debate and the ideological fallacy already indicated are major impediments to action.

The conventional social theory offered as an explanation of the absence of democracy from the third world is desperately hollow and repetitious. In their successive forms dictated by current intellectual fashions, these theories formulate and reformulate the paradigm of "modernization": the third world societies are "half traditional/half modern" (on the path to development and modernization) and therefore preserve the tradition of the autocratic concept of power, being constrained by force of circumstance to democratize gradually as their backward economies "catch up." In this domain as in others, the capitalist road is the only one envisaged, and, furthermore, it is assumed that democratization would necessarily result.

This thesis, hidden for a while by the success of the "third-worldism" of the 1960s among Westerners, has recently reappeared

in a Weberian formulation. Weber, as we know, distinguished supposedly traditional power, described as "patrimonial," personalized and contrary to the concept of modern law, from "bureaucratic" and depersonalized power, based on the concept of law.

In truth Weber's thesis is very Germanic in the sense that it projects particular characteristics of German history on to that of the whole of humankind. Power in pre-capitalist societies was not, as a general rule, either personalized or disrespectful of law. The example of the advanced tributary society provided by imperial China rests on an extremely impersonal mandarin bureaucracy. In pharaonic Egypt the pharaoh Thutmose III of the 18th dynasty wrote to his vizier Rekheret: "What he (the vizier) must do is to take the law into account . . ." Undoubtedly European feudalism of the early centuries (from the barbarian invasions to the 13th and 14th centuries) comes close to the Weberian model in one aspect: the personalization of feudal power. But, in fact, the fragmentation of power, a pre-condition for its personalization, merely illustrates the fact that feudalism is a peripheral variety of the tributary system and not the general rule of the pre-capitalist "tradition." It can also be seen that the system of power loses this personalized character in the mercantilist Europe of absolute monarchies. And the monarchical bureaucracies were similar to those of other advanced tributary societies, as contemporary observers were not slow to note. A distinct exception is that of Germany clinging to the seigneurial stage.

However, the chief characteristic of tributary ideology is not "patrimonialism," but "metaphysical domination." This is true of all cases, the advanced tributary forms, evidenced by Confucianism in China or Islam in the Khalifate, and the peripheral feudal forms. Except that the metaphysical domination operates in the latter case through the autonomous power of the church, compensating for the failings of the state. Once again with the evolution from feudal Europe to absolute monarchies the church-state fusion was close to the general tributary model, as is evidenced by the establishment of national reformed churches or even, in Catholic countries, tendencies such as Gallicanism represented in France.

Furthermore, the "patrimonial" systems in no way disregarded the law. In the advanced tributary systems there was state law governing the whole of social life, as is evidenced, for example, by the *sharia* in Islamic countries. In the feudal peripheral systems, seigneurial power, even when personalized, was obliged to respect customary peasant rights.

Is the modern concept of power, theorized by Weber and his followers, "bureaucratic" in its main impact in contrast with the supposed "patrimonial" concept? Certainly not, since the bureaucratic character is only a form in which it works. Its essential content is bourgeois, produced by the operation of bourgeois democracy—with the distinct exception once again of Germany where the weakness of the bourgeoisie resulted, in the sphere of political power, in an "enlightened despot" until very recent times. In this instance Marx seems to me to outshine Weber in his analyses of this German specificity. Here too, Weber extends a particular characteristic—certainly typical of Wilhelmine Germany but not of parliamentary England or the France of the Third Republic—to the West as a whole.

Weber's disciples (e.g. Richard Sandbrook) have tried to apply this dubious historical thesis to explain specific characteristics of power in contemporary black Africa, where in fact personalization and disregard for law do seem to have marked a great many post-colonial systems. They merely attribute these characteristics to African "tradition."

But is the thesis of "patrimonial power" valid for pre-colonial Africa? Undoubtedly the latter has certain features in common with feudal Europe: pre-colonial black Africa is pre-tributary, still largely at the stage I call communal; feudal Europe preserves communal forms that originated in barbarism, which explains the primitive and peripheral character of the tributary system. This analogy illustrates the significance of customary rights in the two cases and in the absence of a bureaucratic state law: with the proviso that the model of the church is confirmation of the metaphysical domination governing this stage. By contrast, in Africa, the ideology of kinship—appropriate to the communal stage—still dominates the systems of legitimation of power. The ideology looks very like personalized power. But this is much less the case than might be thought, as the power must operate within the framework of a customary law acting as a brake on possible caprices on the part of the "chiefs."

As will be shown later, the contemporary authorities in Africa have little to do with this supposed legacy long since discredited, particularly in the slave trade. As will also be shown, the question of possible charisma of leaders here, as elsewhere, has no "traditional" roots. It is a modern phenomenon to which we shall return.

The neo-Weberian thesis is not the only form of expression of the broader paradigm of modernization. Everyone will remember the

Latin America *desarrollismo* of the 1950s and 1960s arguing that industrialization and bourgeois-style modernization would of themselves bring democratic change. "Dictatorship" was regarded as the residue of a supposedly pre-capitalist past. The fallacy in this ingenuous line of argument has been made clear by the facts. Industrialization and modernization in the framework of this bourgeois plan have merely produced "modernized dictatorship" and replaced the old oligarchical and patriarchal systems with an "efficient and modern" fascistic violence. Peripheral development could take no other course, as it aggravated rather than reduced social inequalities.

The absence of democracy from the periphery of the world capitalist system is a constant that is not a residue of earlier eras but the inevitable consequence of the expansion of actually existing capitalism. International polarization inherent in this expansion brings in turn a manifold internal social polarization: growing inequality in income distribution, widespread unemployment, marginalization, etc. Making the world system the key unit of analysis responds to a social factor of crucial importance for an understanding of what is at stake in the struggles, namely that capital's essential reserve army of labor is to be found geographically in the peripheries of the system. This reserve army is certainly composed of a staggering mass of urban unemployed and under-employed (many times the number of unemployed in the West, even during times of crisis), but also of large segments of non-wage laborers, destined, in accordance with progress in these areas of activity, to be expelled in turn from their land or the so-called "informal" urban activities that keep them busy. The integration—always very limited—of fractions of this reserve army into the active army occurs either through "semi-industrialization" characteristic of the genuine peripheries of today and tomorrow, or by international migration towards the centers. But this migration is always limited, among other things by the employment strategies of the centers, and concerns only an infinitesimal fraction of the worldwide reserve army. "Liberalism," which has never envisaged completing its program of liberalization of exchange and capital flows by unlimited openness to labor migration, remains therefore a truncated swindle.

Hence instability is the rule in the political life of the peripheries. The background of vicious dictatorships (whether military or not) broadly amenable to the demands of the world expansion of capital is occasionally shaken by explosions that challenge them. Such explosions rarely lead to any semblance of political democracy. The

most common model is the "populist" response. This is found in regimes that genuinely address at least some aspects of the social problems and contemplate a development strategy capable of reducing the tragic consequences of peripheralization. These regimes can be given credit for industrialization (mainly by the state), nationalization of sectors dominated by foreign capital, agrarian reforms, efforts (that are sometimes remarkable) in the field of education and health, and some social rights offering a degree of job protection.

But they too have their historical limits: on the one hand they clash with dominant imperialism (quite simply because any policy of social progress at the periphery is incompatible with the demands of the worldwide expansion of capital), but remain incapable of taking this conflict to its logical conclusion, which is delinking; on the other hand these regimes are not democratic. They have often been popular, and as we say supported by the "masses." But these "masses" are maintained in an amorphous passive condition, "mobilized" to "support" but not permitted to organize as an autonomous force in respect to the authorities. These regimes produced by a familiar situation marked by weak class formation embark on the national and popular transformation without being able to carry it through. Therefore the charismatic leader is a common feature of these populist regimes. This inherent weakness of the populist system, combined with external aggression, bring about its fall, most frequently resulting in the return to dictatorship.

There is a middle ground between dictatorships of the right and/or populist popular moments on to which "petty democracy" can sometimes sneak. I am referring to regimes that recognize the principle of multi-party elections, and grant a measure of free speech, but fall short of addressing fundamental social problems and/or challenging relations of dependence and subjection to the world system. The range of these situations is broad enough to include merely apparent "democracies," with the authorities retaining the means—most frequently by electoral fraud—of holding on to power, and other regimes that will bow to the eventual outcome at the polls.

These "democracies" are little more than an expression of the crisis of capitalism's usual despotic system. Latin America, Korea, and the Philippines provide examples of contradictions unresolved by such regimes.

Democratic systems imposed under such circumstances face a striking dilemma, an either-or situation. Either the democratic political system accepts surrender to the demands of world "adjustment"—

it could not then consider any substantial social reform and a crisis of democracy would quickly develop (as is already the case in Argentina). Or the popular forces take hold of the democracy and impose the reforms: the system would then come into conflict with dominant world capitalism and would have to shift from the national bourgeois project to a national and popular one. The dilemma of Brazil and the Philippines falls entirely within this contradiction. In Argentina it has already been seen how the electorate, wearied by the impotence of President Alfonsín's democracy, returned of its own accord to the populist sirens, this time under the guise of fascists openly submissive to foreign dictates!

The areas of the periphery most affected by capitalist expansion are in a more desperate plight. The parlous condition of the "fourth world" is not the outcome of a refusal to integrate into the international division of labor and a "failed" attempt to delink. In fact the "fourth world" that is talked of as something new is a constant feature of capitalist expansion. A clear and lamentable example of this former fourth world is provided by the areas of slave labor in the Americas in the period of mercantilism: North-East Brazil, the West Indies (including Haiti). These areas were regarded as "prosperous" in their day; and within that system they represented the heart of the periphery.

Later the new structures of capitalist development marginalized these areas, and they are today among the most grievously wretched parts of the third world. The history of capitalist expansion does not only include the "development" it has engendered. Capitalism has a destructive side too often omitted from flattering portrayals of the system.

Is Africa not now on the road to exclusion from the world division of labor by reason of a system that has consigned the continent to specialization in agriculture and mining through extensive exploitation of the soils until they are exhausted, and the technological revolution that provides substitutes for some raw materials? Fourth world societies subject to a passive delinking through rejection cannot by definition solve their problems through open door policies. Recolonization sweetened by charity is surely trying to conceal the explicit failure of the neo-liberal solution. Here the "usual" pattern of power is the Tontons Macoutes in Haiti, Somoza in Nicaragua and a disturbing number of dictatorships of the same stamp in contemporary Africa. The thesis of "patrimonial" power criticized above was formulated in regard to such African regimes. At a superficial level it

describes certain features of this kind of regime: extremely personalized (from head of state to petty administrator—the village tyrant), with utter contempt for any notion of legality and rights (including sacrosanct bourgeois property rights), to say nothing of basic human rights, and widespread corruption. There has been a strong temptation to blame this supposed "legacy" on African tradition. A hint of racism may underlie the insinuation. In fact it is no such legacy that produces the "fourth-world" phenomenon, but on the contrary the present world system produces this kind of power in the "fourth world."

Is this "fourth world" dictatorial model a "kleptocracy"—as Nzon-gola-Ntalaja described it—closer to racketeers and the Mafia than to any traditional chiefdom, since the latter was mindful of customary rights? In any event, the regimes on this model are modern states perfectly operational in their own way. How could the authorities operate any differently under fourth-world conditions? The latter deprive the state of any possibility of basing its legitimacy on discernible development, and of finding a social base to carry the appropriate strategy through to a successful conclusion. Not only do the peasantry, the working class and the urban fringe know they have nothing to look forward to, but even the bourgeoisie is deprived of any prospect of meaningful development. All that remains is direct exploitation of power as a means to personal enrichment, or its indirect exploitation through the channel of pseudo-private economic activities whose profitability depends entirely on relations with the administration. Terror, corruption and extreme personalization are therefore essential to the very operation of the system. Charisma—so often spoken of—has no place here: it is not a matter of charisma of leaders who have won genuine popularity at a moment of history as in the populist regimes, but of a pseudo-charisma concocted by the media and incapable of fooling the public. Superficially, the petty bourgeoisie might be regarded as the social base of these systems, insofar as broad strata share power and benefit from the state treasury. When this is not an illusion, the correlation reveals a measure of fascist incorporation of this social stratum. Their hopes have been dashed, and in their powerlessness—in the absence of a revolutionary intelligentsia offering an alternative—they take refuge in power worship.

The main task of progressive forces at the periphery of the system nowadays is to assert the missing democratic component, not to

substitute for the national and social aspects of national and popular liberation, but to reinforce them.

In fact, the old paradigm of national liberation largely ignored the democratic component essential for pursuit of national and popular advance. Democratic consciousness may well be a new phenomenon; in the past, democratic demands were limited to particular segments of the urban bourgeoisie and were not vigorously expressed, except at particular moments of the radicalization of anti-imperialist struggles (the Egyptian Wafd being one of the best examples). Moreover, this democratic consciousness stayed within the narrow limits of bourgeois liberalism. The dominant tendencies in the popular and radical movements of national liberation were more marked by a progressive social content than by the democratic beliefs of their militants, despite the sometimes ritualistic use of the term "democracy" and despite even the more advanced consciousness of some segments of the avant garde. I do not believe it is a caricature to say that the peasant-soldier of the liberation army entering Peking in 1949 was thinking of land reform, but as yet unaware of the meaning of democracy. Today his worker or student son or daughter has new aspirations in that regard. The same was true of the Egyptian peasant, even the Wafd voter, and many others no doubt.

But what democracy are we talking about? This is not the place to disparage the heritage of Western bourgeois democracy: respect for rights and the rule of law, freedom of speech, institutionalizing of electoral procedure and separation of powers, checks and balances, etc. But we should not stop there. Western democracy has no social dimension. The people's democracies at moments of revolutionary social change (the USSR in the 1920s, Maoist China, etc.) have also taught us much about what "people's power" should be, if we give this much abused expression its real meaning. To stop at Western democratic forms without taking into consideration the social transformations demanded by the anti-capitalist revolt of the periphery means holding on to a caricature of bourgeois democracy and thus ensuring alienation from the people and extreme vulnerability. For our democracy to take root it must, from the start, take a position that goes beyond capitalism. In this as in so many other domains the law of unequal development operates.

This is the prospect that imperialism cannot accept. That is why the "democracy" campaign orchestrated by the West stresses some features of democracy and ignores others. For example, it equates multi-party politics with democracy. In contrast with the language of

western media about democracy, our thinking concerns democracy in the service of national liberation and social progress (and not in opposition to them, or overlooking them).

I would argue that "Jacobin democracy," to borrow an expression from the French revolution, is astonishingly modern. In each of the three great revolutions of the modern world (the French, the Russian and the Chinese), the play of ideas and social forces at moments of radicalization has succeeded in moving far beyond the requirements of "historically, objectively necessary" social transformation. Hence Jacobin democracy did more than merely establish "bourgeois power." Although this democracy operated in a framework of private ownership, its drive to establish power genuinely at the service of the "people" clashed with its merely bourgeois needs. At this stage of social development the bourgeoisie looked for little more than the qualified democracy such as Britain, the United States and France practiced in the 19th century. The bourgeoisie was furthermore willing to compromise with the monarchy and the aristocracy, as British history shows. The aspirations of the "people"—namely the mass of peasants and artisans—went further. The people wanted something more than "free trade." This was true to such an extent that during the Convention, they launched the remarkably modern slogan "Liberalism (i.e. economic) is the enemy of democracy"! This advanced slogan was a foretaste of a socialist consciousness yet to come (Babeufism is an example). In the same way, the USSR in the 1920s and Maoist China expressed a communist vision well beyond the requirements of the "national and popular" reform on the agenda. Certainly these moments of radicalization are fragile; in the end narrower concepts more consonant with "objective" needs win the day. But it would be quite wrong to underestimate their significance as an indication of the trend.

"Jacobin democracy," rejuvenated by radicalization of the socialist revolutions of our times, is the democracy to which the popular classes of the contemporary third world aspire—albeit in a confused manner. It is distinguishable from liberal bourgeois democracy, which ignores the dimension of necessary social reforms, just as it is distinguishable from the anti-democratic "populist mobilizations" to which we referred above.

My proposition certainly pays no heed to "fashion"! The latter nowadays seeks to devalue moments of revolutionary radicalization in the name of "realism." At the same time it draws themes from another tradition: that of the "local democracy" familiar in English-

speaking countries. "Decentralization" and autonomy of a dismembered and segmented civil society are often in this spirit proposed as realizable advances, potentially more fertile than the supposed illusion of "statist" popular democracy. The trends in this direction, often tinged with religiosity, seem to me to suggest a strategy too strongly biased by "anti-statism" to be genuinely up to the real historic challenge. Yet there is something to be learned from this movement; and a genuine dialogue is necessary here. That said, it is difficult nowadays to know if the social movements of all kinds presently existing at the periphery (and at the center) are capable of making headway in answering the objective challenge.

Some of the movements seem to be dead-ends. This is the case with the religious fundamentalist renewals or "ethnic" communal movements. As symptoms of the crisis and not solutions to it, and as expressions of disillusionment, they will collapse as soon as they have revealed their impotence in the face of the real challenge.

Other movements may, on the contrary, play a role in the reconstruction of a plan for society "beyond capitalism" that resolves the contradictions actually existing capitalism is incapable of overcoming, by drawing on the lessons of the first steps in this direction. It seems to me that this occurs whenever the "new movements" (or the old ones!) do not stand exclusively on the terrain of "state conquest," but on that of another concept of social power to be won. The choice is not between "struggle for power or struggle for something else" (what would the latter be?); but the question is for what kind of power the struggle is being waged. The organizational forms based on the prevailing "traditional" concept of power (power=state) are inevitably going to lose much of their legitimacy once the peoples understand the conservative character of the state. By contrast, forms of organization addressing the complex social content of the power to be developed will be increasingly successful. In this category the theory of "non-party politics" may prove fruitful. The same may be said of "anti-authoritarianism" in Latin America, in which Pablo Casanova sees the principal requisite of the "new" movements: rejection of authoritarianism in the state, in the party, and in the leadership; and repudiation of doctrinaire concepts in ideology. This is a reaction against the burdensome legacy of the continent's history, and undoubtedly this reaction will stimulate progress. But likewise, and for the same basic reason, feminism in the West, with its aim of attacking at least some of the roots of autocracy, stems from that same concept of social power. To some extent the West is in the vanguard

of breakthroughs in social liberation. Whether these advances imply breakthroughs "beyond capitalism," or remain absorbable by the social system, raises new questions. In the medium term at least, it would seem that a central capitalist position has so many strengths that the movements in question will not shake the foundations of capitalist management of society. The future of the "new movements" remains uncertain. It is not impossible that they will wither away in the current crisis.

Can objective criteria be defined in such a way as to encourage the movement to take the essential national and popular direction? I believe they can, and I make the following preliminary comments.

The principal task is that of democratic re-politicization of the masses. The latter had a view of independence as something to be regained. Once the aim was achieved, the language on which national liberation was based ran out of steam. Can the new re-politicization be "extra-party" or even "anti-party" since parties have been devalued as a consequence of their post-independence behavior? The question is open, although I personally am somewhat shocked at what seems to me a degree of "paternalism" underlying the activity of many of the trendy "non-governmental organizations."

Secondly, democratic re-politicization of the people must be based on reinforcing their capacity for self-organization, self-development and self-defence. Obviously the aim of self-development, through various forms of cooperation, co-management and popular management, provokes conflict with the state, since national and popular society remains the locus of objective class conflict: overt conflict if the state is neo-colonial, latent if the state is embarked on a national and popular program. Through such actions, might it be possible, for example, to transform activities inaccurately described as "informal" into a "people's economy"? Under current conditions, these activities are fully integrated into the global capitalist system and fulfill precise functions of ensuring the reproduction of the labor force at minimum cost or supplying sub-processing of inputs at low cost. They are a necessary adjunct to ensuring the profitability of capitalist exploitation. Transforming these activities into a "people's economy" would be fraudulent if this conflict of interests were not faced openly.

Thirdly, the kind of action envisaged here raises anew the question of relations between the "movement" and the parties of the historical left, and populism, established in the fight for independence or in the fight waged against the neo-colonial system. It

seems to be neither proper nor cogent to lump these parties—whatever their "mistakes" and historical limits—with those who have been responsible for neo-colonial management. Similarly the question once again arises of relations between the "movement" and the new forces that have coalesced at one time or another on a national and progressive platform. I am obviously thinking of the organizations of anti-imperialist and progressive soldiers at the root of changes responsive to popular aspirations, even if the changes were inaugurated by coups d'état (Egypt, Libya, Rawlings' Ghana, Sankara's Burkina Faso, etc.)

Fourthly, analysis of the strategy of democratic re-politicization implies the re-introduction of at least three broad debates of theoretical significance:

(1) the debate on the role of the revolutionary intelligentsia as a social catalyst capable of drafting a concrete alternative plan and promoting the struggles for its implementation;

(2) the debate on the cultural content of this alternative plan—its potentially universalist scope being essential in my opinion, its relations with the national cultural heritage etc.;

(3) the debate on the long-term outlook: socialism or capitalism?

Although it is fashionable nowadays to deny the validity of such debates, I believe they are indispensable. Here I merely point them out, as I have discussed the details in my other writings.

Fifth, current history offers some tentative examples of this direction. I am thinking here of the experience of Thomas Sankara's Burkina Faso, but of others even more abused by the dominant media of the West (Gadaffi-ism for example!) Obviously the first steps fall short of solving the fundamental issues of the relationship between the authorities and parties of the radical left, the relationship to populism, to the soldiers, etc. However the debate on these propositions should be opened.

Sixth, I am not suggesting magic formulae to replace the necessary democratic dialogue between all the components of the movement. I am merely suggesting that if polarization imposes "alternative development," then the only options are: acceptance of "wealth" as the backbone of the aspirations to be encouraged, or its replacement by "welfare." To find answers to this dilemma we need to return to old papa Marx whose critique of the market ("commodity alienation"), far from being "played out," is rejuvenated by the re-discoveries of the contemporary movement. A "market" that has not to be "controlled," but eliminated, albeit very gradually through the

slow maturing of consciousness and practice and not by bureaucratic rejection.

In the final analysis the issue of democracy cannot be debated without reference to the philosophical bases of the various interpretations of democracy.

Contemporary interpretations, broadly typified by Anglo-American evolutionism and pragmatism, impoverish the debate by treating democracy as a set of narrowly defined rights and practices, independent of the desired social outlook. This democracy can then stabilize the society, by leaving "evolution" to "objective forces" operating regardless of human will. Furthermore, in the analysis of these objective forces the focus is on technical and scientific progress, while the social realities that hide behind "market forces" are systematically ignored. Finally, democratic transformation of society is regarded as being largely the product of evolution; hence the functional role of the revolutionary process in history can be played down.

I am in total disagreement with this line of argument. The analysis of economic alienation provided by Marx is in my view central to any scientific and realistic understanding of the mechanism of capitalist reproduction. It is the only analysis that places democracy in its true context, and grasps its stabilizing role. Along with Marx, the Frankfurt School and Karl Polanyi, I find it impossible to interpret our world outside this analytical frame of reference. The method leads of necessity to a rehabilitation of the crucial function of revolutions, moments of qualitative transformation and crystallization of potentialities inconceivable without revolution.

In this view, the contemporary world and the perception of its future supersession are the product of the three great (and sole) revolutions of the modern world: the French, the Russian and the Chinese. With Immanuel Wallerstein I attach qualitative significance to the break inaugurated by the French revolution. For the break substitutes a system of secular legitimation of political and social action for the ancient religious legitimation appropriate to what I have called tributary ideologies. In that sense the break inaugurated the later evolutions, whether of bourgeois democracy or socialism. The Paris Commune slogan in 1871 ("Neither God, nor Caesar, nor Tribune") was no accident; it flowed from—and was an extension of—the slogan of 1789 ("Liberty, Equality, Fraternity").

The stress on this ideological aspect of the French revolution challenges the very concept of bourgeois revolution. The supposedly fundamental definition of class struggle opposes the oppressed and

the oppressors in a given mode of production: peasants and feudal lords in one instance, proletariat and capitalists in another. Bourgeois revolution would then necessarily be a peasant revolution, socialist revolution a working class revolution. But capitalism did not abolish feudal exploitation to replace it with an egalitarian society (the aim of peasant struggles); it established a new form of exploitation, the possibility of which had not even been imagined by the struggling peasants. The new capitalist society and the bourgeois class were established partly on the fringe of, or even outside, feudal society (comprising feudal lords and peasants), in the free towns, partly even within the peasantry, by new differentiations (rich peasants and landless peasants reduced to the status of farm laborers) produced by the extension of commodity relations, strengthened sometimes by peasant struggles. As we know, this new capitalist society ripened slowly within the "ancien régime" which were social and political systems remaining essentially "feudal." The bourgeois revolution thus consisted of the political moment marking the abolition of the "ancien régime" and installation of a new kind of organization ensuring the political dominance of the new economically dominant class. The bourgeois revolution is therefore not the starting point but the culmination of an already long history of capitalist development.

Coincidence between the peasant social revolution and the bourgeois political revolution has occurred in only one historical instance, that of the French revolution (which is, therefore, the sole genuine revolution of the bourgeois stage of history). Here, obviously the bourgeoisie was forced into the alliance; their radical advances and retreats shaped the stages of the revolution itself and the later evolutions. There is, however, no comparable coincidence elsewhere. Not even in England. The peasant-bourgeois radical revolution of mid-17th century England, perhaps because it came earlier (as is evidenced by its religious expression through religious reinterpretation; whereas the French revolution made politics secular; the first came before the Enlightenment, the second inherited it . . .), was aborted at the end of the century to give way to the scarcely glorious "Glorious Revolution" (not even a revolution!). And not even in North America. Liberation from the colonial yoke was a political act, without revolutionary social impact, since it merely confirmed the power of the merchant society already established as such in New England from the outside (it is significant that the American revolution did not even raise the issue of slavery). A fortiori in Germany, Italy and Japan. The general rule is that capitalism develops inde-

pendently of peasant revolution, even if in some instances peasant struggles have contributed to the particular direction and shape of capitalist civilization. But capitalism is not developed without an "agricultural revolution," in the sense of establishing a landed bourgeoisie often of great landowners (ex "feudal lords") driving away the surplus rural population in order to modernize in favor of a largely market production. In all these cases the bourgeoisie attacks the state, seizes it and changes society from above.

The very particular circumstances of the French revolution explain its advances beyond the mere adjustment of relations of production to the demands of capitalist development: its secularized legitimacy; its universal concepts; the abolition of slavery it proclaims. These advances half-opened the window on a still distant future. Without the French revolution utopian socialism or Marx would be unthinkable.

The Russian and Chinese revolutions also had a dimension of grandeur sometimes described as "messianic." Wrongly in my view, since the future they portend remains a realistic possibility, a necessity if humankind is to avoid barbarism. But it is clear that these advances, going even further than those conceived in Paris in 1793 and 1871 (since the worldwide spread of capitalism, on the one hand, and the phenomenon of Marx, on the other, occurred in the interim), are not the simple product of objective demands for immediate social transformation on the agenda in Russia in 1917 and in China in 1949.

I maintain, therefore, that the three revolutions under discussion are the great moments when our vision of the modern world and its possible and desirable future was defined. I believe that finding previous moments as decisive means going back 1,500 to 2,500 years earlier. Back to the times of the great ideological revolutions through which the crystallization of tributary society is expressed, in our part of the world under the successive forms of Hellenism, Christianity and Islam, elsewhere under the forms of Confucianism and Buddhism. At the level of ideology—a dominant factor in pre-capitalist societies—they represented as gigantic a qualitative transformation as that wrought in our era by the three modern revolutions. It is also worth noting that these ancient revolutions went further than simple adjustment to the demands of social evolution: by proclaiming, for example, a universalism which the regional tributary societies did not require. The changes between the historic revolutions have been of local and minor significance, provoked merely by continual adjust-

ment of various spheres of social activity to the constraints of "evolution."

The interpretation of democracy that is part of the analytical framework we offer here is very different from that of Anglo-American evolutionist philosophy. In our analysis, democracy becomes a destabilizer, the means by which concepts "ahead of their time" continue to progress and spur on social action for progress.

The current offensive of the West, ostensibly "in favor of democracy," has the merit of concealing this destabilizing tendency of democracy. I draw the conclusion that it is not really an offensive in favor of democracy, but an offensive against socialism. The cause of democracy—in its impoverished form as a means of stabilizing an alienated society—is then mobilized as a tactical weapon. And like all tactical weapons it is deployed with a grain of cynicism. What other explanation is there for the way the western media, so touchy in its defense of freedom of expression in the countries of "actually existing socialism," stand up for those defending the freedom of the Afghan mullahs who do not conceal that their program aims to close the schools (beginning with those for girls of course) that the infamous secularists in the pay of Moscow had dared to open? What other explanation is there for the way these media ignore the interventions of Western paratroopers coming to the rescue of African dictators at the end of their tether? What other explanation is there for the way the assiduous defenders of trade-union freedom in Poland overlook the fact that adjustment policies imposed on the third world envisage the dismantling of trade unions?

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