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# IS THE BOURGEOISIE STILL IN THE ASCENDANTS?

by

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1. The absolutely basic question of our time, to which all the other questions, whether major or minor ones, are ultimately linked, is whether the bourgeoisie is still in the ascendant.

If it is, how would this be most decisively expressed? In the continued advance of the productive forces in the imperialist centres, exercising their hegemony over a good part of the globe, and its world-scale role of driving force behind the shaping of every aspect of the societies under its sway? In the extraordinary development of capitalism in regions of Latin America, Asia and Africa which had hitherto been only very superficially touched? Or by the emergence (or re-emergence) of neocapitalist forms (perhaps simply capitalist forms) in regions which had broken with capitalism and engaged in a socialist transition (U.S.S.R. and also, perhaps, Cuba, China, Viet Nam)?

If, on the other hand, one maintains that the bourgeoisie is no longer a rising class, how would this be expressed, in terms of the crisis of capitalism? In the "challenging", albeit still almost purely intellectual and marginal of "capitalist civilisation" in its advanced centres; the "crisis of values" and the appearance of a new workers' move towards "self-management?" In the dead-end capitalist developments in Latin America, Asia and Latin America; the possibility - even necessity - of a radicalisation resulting from the national liberation struggle and leading to the socialist transition? Or the dead-ends into which "restoration" of capitalism has led, after the socialist break, and the fact that progress has nonetheless been made, even if in successive and unequal stages, in the transition to socialism?

Finding an answer to these question is made an even more complex exercise because the question of whether capitalism can only be

superceded by communism (to which the socialist transition leads) still remains unanswered. In it possible to argue that capitalism could be followed by a new "inevitable" (or at least "possible") class mode of production which would guarantee a further development of the productive forces on a sufficient scale to make the abolition of classes an absolutely unavoidable requirement for any further progress?

2. One can find in the real world situation sufficient contradictory elements to provide plenty of ammunition for polemics and answers at the extreme ends of the spectrum. The writings of the great names of the Marxist school - Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao - certainly furnish a wealth of material for anyone who wishes to base his answer on Marxology.

I wanted to avoid both these temptations (although I am not sure whether I have succeeded) and I have tried to base my answers by a systematic examination of the development of capitalism on a world scale and on the Marxist conceptual tools which are used to grasp the meaning of this history. I am fully aware of the fact that once one is only interested in understanding in order to act, one can no longer claim, as "bourgeois" researchers do, to separate "science" and "ideology".

I have therefore attempted to give a dual answer by (1) proposing, for the first part of the question, a historical and theoretical explanation of the reasons why capitalism appeared and developed as it did. Here I first of all counter what I consider to be false premises in this field, those which I maintain are inspired by a western-centred and linear philosophy which turns its back on Marxism; and (2) by proposing, for the second part, a more thorough analysis of the contradictions of the contemporary period which are expressed through the centre/periphery conflict within the world capitalist system in the successive phases of imperialism, because this provides the

basis for a correct assessment of the liberation movement and its future prospects (capitalism or socialism?).

I should now like to go further and move away from the historical plane on to the more general one of 1) the ambivalent and contradictor nature of the national liberation movement and 2) the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the socialist transition.

The contradictory nature of the national liberation movement.

3. All the expressions of Westerncentredness without exception ascribe a marginal and purely decorative role to the analysis of the functions of the periphery in the capitalist system.

The Western-centred analysis of the transition to capitalism already leaves out of account the decisive role played by the periphery right from the outset. It maintains that it was the internal contradictions of feudalism alone which explain this transition and even goes so far as to elevate this position to the status of a "Marxist" principle. The debate on this question between Sweezy and Dobb is a good example. The revisionists of our age, inspired by the "constructions" of Tokei, base on this "principle" their conclusion that Europe alone was destined to invent capitalism, "Asia" being condemned to indefinite stagnation at an "earlier" stage. The Trotskyists immediately follow in their footsteps, without realising that this "Marxism," which would not have displeased Cecil Rhodes, is nothing but an expression of imperialist ideology.

The position I have put forward is quite a different one. The internal contradictions are primordial and decisive. These contradictions are the same in all the tributary systems and implied the necessary passage to capitalism in all cases. They could, by themselves and without any external effect, have engendered capitalism in Europe or elsewhere. But one should not confuse this general

proposition with the specific explanation of the transition as it actually took place. This occurred more rapidly and earlier in Europe, not because Europe alone "was to invent capitalism," but for quite another reason : the primitive and peripheral character of feudalism. In the real historical formation of capitalism, Europe, right from the beginnings of mercantilism, provided herself with and subjugated a periphery whose exploitation speeded up her own rate of development and at the same time halted or diverted that of the subjugated regions. The ideologies of imperialism, even when they call themselves Marxists, inevitably confuse the basic methodological propositions and the real effective march of history, thereby reducing facts to a construction which strips them of any "embarassing" elements. If there had been an epidemic wiping out the entire population of Asia, Africa and America, European capitalism would still have developed, without the periphery. Likewise, if the epidemic had wiped out all the population of the globe with the exception of China, capitalism would have developed there. But no such epidemic ever did break out. And capitalism in fact developed through exploitation of the periphery. This fact must therefore be pointed out instead of being submerged in a "theoretical" peroration because it is "embarassing."

The discussion on imperialism can be mentioned as a parallel. Rosa Luxembourg believed she could demonstrate that the mechanism of accumulation could not operate, even theoretically, without a periphery. She was wrong, and Lenin pointed out that the arguments in Volume II of Capital clearly established the possibility of accumulation without an "external medium." But Lenin did not draw the conclusion that the periphery did not exist! On the contrary, he affirmed its importance.

4. When, moreover, "external effects" are rejected, are they really external effects, or more specifically, what are they external to? If one takes the world capitalist system, centre-periphery relations are not external but very much internal to the system. Now I

maintain that it is on this level that the contradictions of capitalism must be apprehended, taking the entire field of capitalist realities into account. In order to eliminate the contradictions which are the most "embarassing", the capitalist system is first reduced to a "mode of province" (in its abstract purity). Innumerable "readings of Capital" are then substituted for a study of capitalism, and dogmatic rigidity is elevated to the status of basic principle.

The logic of this attitude leads directly away from the province of Marxism. By taking to its limits this separation of "internal" effects from "external" effects, and thereby ignoring dialectics, one can reach its logical conclusion, that is, that the contradictions should not even be apprehended at national formation level but exclusively at that of the base unit in which capitalist exploitation starts, i.e. enterprise level. "Circulation" is excluded from this already impoverished analysis, which is nonetheless claimed to be Marxist, and there follows an interminable meandering in an intellectual fog of arguments about the "genesis of exploitation in production relations". Using the argument that in Marxism production determines ~~production~~ distribution, the label "circulationist" is attached to any debate on circulation. In a nutshell, the argument is restricted to a rehash of "the essentials," navel-gazing takes the place of a clear look outwards at reality, any real process of questioning is rendered sterile and action becomes impossible.

The redistribution of surplus value through the circulation of capital (Volume III of Capital), the analysis of the relationship between productive and non-productive labour, the correct definition of collective labour, the analysis of the specific class alliances of a given formation, all this is excluded from the field of study and one arrives at a political position which exists, and has a name: anarcho-trade unionism (anarcho-syndicalism) which calls on the workers to drop "politics" (which always go beyond the enterprise horizons). There is a certain naive brand of "self-management" which also feeds on this theory.

In fact one must always maintain a vision of the whole. But this whole - the world capitalist system in the case in point - can neither be reduced to the "pure" capitalist mode nor even to a cluster of national formations at varying unequal stages of development. The content of this inequality must be indicated, and it cannot be grasped in terms of each formation examined separately but only in relation to the whole. Inequality, whatever its origin, makes possible the creation of an organised hierarchy which not only reproduces it (statically) but renews it (dynamically).

The decisive factor is that the capitalist system has always been a "world" system since its very inception and one can understand nothing about it if one excludes the interaction between the effects which are "internal" to one of its parts and those which are "external" to it, though not external to the whole system. That is why the contribution made by researchers who have stressed the role of the periphery in the very establishment of capitalism, right from its origins, is neither negligeable, decorative nor even complementary. On the contrary, this contribution restores history to its true dimensions. These writers cannot be criticised for having "neglected" the "internal effects" which have been so exhaustively studied by others. The former have been able to make use of the latters' contribution, albeit sometimes briefly, but with a view to establishing the link between these internal effects and the so-called external ones, thereby presenting capitalism in all its dimensions. It is not my intention here to give a full account of the decisive contribution of these researchers but I would nonetheless wish to say how important I consider the persistent and effective work which André Gunder Frank has been doing for the past twenty years, the pioneering efforts of Oliver Cox and the magnificent body of research produced by Immanuel Wallerstein. Elsewhere I have commented on this contribution sometimes elaborating on the arguments, particularly in the Arab and African sphere. On

the basis of this work, questions which are essential to an understanding of capitalism must be reformulated, among others that of the articulation of production and circulation (and the problems relating to "longdistance trade" in the precapitalist systems and in the transition to capitalism, the "international" division of labour and unequal exchange (the organisation of the productive process on a world scale) the action of the political and ideological superstructure, and so on. In other words all the questions which the dogmatic reduction of capitalism to the capitalist mode endeavours to eliminate.

5. In this context the question of the failure of the most advanced tributary societies to achieve the transition to capitalism and Europe's success can be posed in scientific trams and no longer in those of Westerncentred ideology.

In history, a hundred attempts have to be made before a decisive breakthrough makes it impossible to turn back the clock. I have tried to demostrate the specific reasons why Arab "mercantilism" failed, just as I have also felt justified in claiming that the Egyptian mercantilism of Mohamed Ali could have initiated a capitalist development had it not been thwarted by nothing less than European agression. The argument that only Europe could have invented capitalism seems to me, therefore, to be unfounded. Moreover, when one looks more closely at the West, one discovers that before the English breakthrough, there were abortive attempts by Italy and Spain. Does this mean, then, that the European miracle is really a Northern European one? Is it a case of starting with Marx to arrive at Max Weber?

There is nothing strange about this set of failure by non-European societies. Attempts at socialism surely fail more frequent than any "general theory" might suggest. Should one conclude that

the failure of the Paris Commune means that the French formation will "never" engender socialism, which will have to be brought to it from outside? And what about the failure of English Chartism in the 19th century, of the radicalisation of the working class movement in the United States in the 20th century? I know that some people maintain that socialism was impossible in Russia (unless the German revolution came to its rescue) and, for the same reasons, that it is condemned in advance in China, Viet Nam and everywhere else except Europe and the United States.

6. While it has always been a world system, capitalism has nonetheless passed through a number of stages which it is useful to define. In this essential delimitation, the imperialist "break to use a fashionable expression - seems to me to be important.

It marks the end of the ascendant period of capitalism on a world scale and the beginning of its crisis. In this sense it is really the "highest stage" of capitalism. Of course, capitalism did continue to develop after 1880 and even at a rate incomparable with the past. But this development never again enabled new centres to emerges and henceforth - and this is my argument - the development of capitalism was to be the simultaneous development of imperialism and of "under-development." I have also proposed that the various periods of imperialism should also be defined and I have even tried to discern the main lines of a possible new stage in the imperialist system.

The thesis of "absolute limits", which could be attributed to Rosa Luxembourg, overlooks this decisive aspect: that the development of capitalism at the periphery remains the development of a dependent and incomplete form of capitalism. The mistake some authors make in defining different periods comes from an inadequate assessment of the nature of the imperialist break.

7. The imperialist break opened the period of socialist transition at world scale in a situation in which unequal development prevailed. This is the essence of my standpoint. For imperialism has transferred the centre of gravity of capitalism's contradictions, relegated yesterday's principal contradictions to the rank of secondary contradictions, modified by new contradictions. The working class struggle in the centres has ceased to be the driving force of history. Cecil Rhodes understood perfectly that civil war could be avoided in Europe on condition that the contradictions of capitalism were transferred through external expansion. Social democratic hegemony has no other meaning. But at the same time imperialism has pushed to the fore a new anticapitalist force: that of the nations of the periphery, and it is their struggle which has now become the driving force of history. A tremendous battle has begun between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of these nations, and its outcome is decisive for socialism. Since national liberation cannot be fully achieved under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, it must therefore continue from one stage to the next in the development of the imperialist system until the moment when the proletariat having finally seized the leadership of the movement full national liberation poses the new problems of the transition to socialism. This is how socialism clears its way forward, a way which cannot be predicted in advanced.

As a consequence, the analysis of the contradictions of contemporary capitalism must come to grips with the entire world system right from the outset. An umpteenth reading of Capital will do nothing to help the reader grasp these contradictions. By pointing out ad nauseam the overriding importance of analysing capitalist exploitation at its source, in capitalist production relations, one will at best produce an elementary text-book, more often than not an academic thesis in Marxology - which may or may not be good of its kind - but the real analysis will not have advanced an inch. Any "Marxist"

who believes that the analysis of the contradictions at world level is a purely decorative exercise, any "Marxist" who consequently considers that the anti-imperialist struggle is subsidiary - not to say an act of charity - deprives himself of the means of acting to transform reality. Is he really a Marxist, then?

So I shall not return here to the proposition which have been made regarding the phases of imperialism and the nature of the "solutions" of its contradictions through the solution of its successive crises from one phase to the next.

To say, as Pierre Salama does, for example, that the analysis of accumulation on a world scale must really be undertaken at world level, and not simply taking the periphery as a starting point, is nothing but a pious hope so long as the western-centred vision, which makes changes at the periphery "derive" from the "autonomous" changes at the centre thereby ignoring dialectics is not abandoned. Since ninety-nine per cent of the analyses of accumulation haughtily ignore the world field to concentrate exclusively on the centres, just as, in the past, ninety-nine per cent of the "analyses" of the transition to capitalism ignored the mercantilist periphery, and since, for the same reasons, these "analyses" are not only "incomplete" but proceed from a basic error, it was and still is necessary to start from the opposite end. In this way I hope it will be possible to create more favourable conditions for a correct analysis of the whole.

8. Is the national liberation movement what I claim it to be, the driving force of history and the main force behind the emergence of socialism?

When this movement, by an outrageous simplification, is reduced to that of the struggle for national (political) independence in Asia and Africa, there is a temptation to conclude that it really only occupies a relatively brief period in contemporary history , from 1945 to 1965-70, perhaps.

Let us therefore take another look at contemporary history. Since 1880 the imperialist phenomenon has dominated all the major events, weighed on every confrontation and determined the solutions. Simultaneously, since 1880 the national liberation movement has emerged and become increasingly substantial.

At first, between 1880 and 1914, the struggle for national liberation had not yet become the driving force of history, while the working class revolt at the centres of the system had ceased to be so. This is why the period was the "golden age" of imperialism. The working class was already under the thumb of the imperialist bourgeoisie, and while it was only in 1914 that the full catastrophic dimensions of this situation were grasped, it becomes clear, looking back on the period, that it was the Second International which was the instrument of this subordination. The liberation movements had only just begun to take shape and had not yet emerged from the pre-capitalist age; they were still calling for "resistance to aggression" rather than for "freedom". That is why interimperialist contradiction held the stage during this period . This was the "belle époque" when Big Power Diplomacy was the driving force of history, a phase which came to an end with the Great War, the Russian Revolution, the 4th of May Movement in China, Kemal Atatürk, the Egyptian Wafd, and the Indian Congress.

Between 1918 and 1945, the stage was no longer exclusively held by interimperialist contradictions, which nonetheless, still persisted and set the victors and the vanquished of 1918 at each other's throats. At the same time other phenomenon came increasingly into the limelight : the rise of the Russian Revolution, its subsequent marking time and steps backward, the rise of the Chinese revolution, the upsurge of liberation movements on the three continents (Latin America populism, modern independence-seeking revolts and revolutions which

were put down in Asia and Africa). This complex of emergent forces once again sharpened the "internal" contradictions in the centres while the post-war crises followed by that of 1930 further underlined the social contradictions. The period closed with the Second World War, which marked the end of the renewed upsurge of the Western working class movement, while other forces, those of the Soviet Union and the national liberation movements, continued to develop.

A new period opened in 1945, in which the predominant role of the national liberation movements on the world stage became undeniable fact. Interimperialist contradictions were diminished to an extraordinary degree by American hegemony, so much so that the "super-imperialism" argument seemed to be confirmed. At this juncture I would like to make a slight digression. The "super-imperialism" thesis, foresoen by Kautsky and very much in fashion in the United States today proceeds from an economistic reduction : the State becomes the passive instrument of the "multinationals" who shape the world in their own image (as Stephen Hymer has tried to show and, in the same spirit, Vernon, Palloix and others). I do not share this point of view. Even the American hegemony of the last quarter of a century, while it cannot be denied, has not reduded the secondary imperialist bourgeoisies of Europe and Japan to the role of "compradores."

As for the Western working class movement, it never recovered from its defeat of the 1930s and 1940s, and looking back it appeared to be just as subordinated as it was before 1914. The Soviet Union, confined within the frontiers of its Empire, only appeared on the world scene in relation to the Liberation movements and it was through the relations it established with them that it assumed a world dimension. During this quarter century, the national liberation movement was carried right through in Eastern Asia and Cuba, where it opened the way to possible socialist transitions, while elsewhere it achieved its initial objective, political independence, without having opened the way to such transitions.

Is the achievement of this latter objective going to put an end to the national liberation movement and its potential for socialist change? This is the argument of ~~General~~ Gérard Chaliand, and it seems to be confirmed by the immediate facts of the last few years, which is why it has gained temporary currency. But I think it is wrong - and here I do not question the intentions of its author. On the contrary, I want to stress very strongly that Chaliand is one of the rare people to have understood in practice the importance of the anti-imperialist struggle and who has courageously and lucidly taken the decision to become part of it. He has, moreover, always been on the right side of the barricades, and that seems to me more important than anything else, including the "third worldist" illusions he cherished (and which were not shared by all the revolutionaries of the Third World itself). But his argument reduces the ultimate aim of the national liberation movement to independence. Independence, however, does not resolve the contradictions of peripheral capitalism. It no doubt creates new conditions, hence the pause. No doubt the superceding of the phase of "embryo" peripheral capitalism imposed by political domination (the "colonial mode of production", as Rey calls it), by the spontaneous reproduction of dependent capitalism (the "neo-colonial mode of production") through the hegemony of the local bourgeoisie and through the very economic mechanisms of the capitalist system, somewhat modifies the nature of the aims of the liberation movement, as well as its methods of struggle and the organisation of the camps. That is why Chaliand suggests considering that the period of the liberation movement has drawn to a close and propose that the period now beginning in the Third World should be given its rightful name : the period of internal class struggle.

The error here is that of failure to see that this class struggle continues to take place within the framework of the unfinished national liberation struggle. The bourgeoisies of the Third World try to "continue" this struggle, by making sure they are its leaders, as I

have shown in my analysis of the strategy they put forward for achieving "economic independence." The popular classes can no more ignore this struggle today than they could ignore the aim of independence yesterday. But they must impose their leadership through their own autonomous movement, and this is how they must open the way to socialist transition. That is why I believe that National liberation still holds the stage. History and history alone (not "theory" and even less Marxology) will tell us whether this will be combined with a new upsurge of the working class movement in the West.

9. When set against this background, that of uninterrupted revolution by stages, the debates on the strategy for the new phase of national liberation take on a practical aspect. These are the real debates within the movement and the struggle. Their real scope is in sharp contrast with the total absence of scope (other than an ideological one) of the "theories" in which the triviality of the affirmation of the "primacy of the class struggle" cloaks the fact that the concrete conditions of the class struggle on a world scale have been simply effaced from the argument.

This is not the place to deal with the current state of play in these debates nor even to give a rapid history of them. But simply by way of illustration, one may recall the hasty extrapolations allowing some authors to claim "the suicide of the petite bourgeoisie" in the course of the popular national liberation struggle. Need one mention the contradictory viewpoints and the introduction of so many "ifs" and "buts" into discussions about such vital questions as the socialist organisation of the rural world and how this ties in with the persistence of commodity relations, the role of industry in agricultural development, the advantages and difficulties of autarchy etc. in the transition from popular national liberation to socialism? I shall come back to these arguments when dealing with the problem of the contradiction of socialist transition.

The contradictory character of the national liberation movement is reflected in a dual reality, in which on the one hand each partial national liberation victory creates the conditions for a further extension of capitalist development, but on the other hand, since this is dependent peripheral capitalist development, it does not "diminish" the contradictions between the mass of the people and imperialism with its allies but, on the contrary, deepens them.

Is it "possible" for this movement to go on indefinitely, passing through successive stages without there ever occurring the qualitative break which opens the way to socialist transition? Would this not mean that the process of capitalist development would finally be completed and the contradiction between centre and periphery disappear? Marx, in a short sentence I have quoted elsewhere, did express the idea that it was possible that Europe, pregnant with socialist revolution, might have to face the rise of capitalism engendered in this "little corner of the world". But Marx wrote that before the emergence of imperialism and made a double assumption concerning the continued radicalisation of the European working class movement and the non-dependent nature of capitalist development in Asia.

Since then, the hypothesis of a complete development of capitalism in the peripheries dominated by imperialism has been, and continues to be gratuitous, and such a hypothesis is thus of a dubious nature. Marxism refrains from this kind of "reasoning" based on "ifs" which run counter to the real movement of events. I believe, however, that I have shown that the new phase of imperialism taking shape, based on the real social forces of contemporary capitalism is not moving in the direction of a fully evolved capitalism (the aim of "economic independence" proclaimed by the Third World Bourgeoisies cannot be achieved by the strategies they advocate) but towards an extension of the present dependent incomplete capitalist development.

Of course, "if" the popular forces do not act at the periphery and "if" the process were to continue beyond this new phase, in other words "if" capitalism still survives for another thousand years, it will end up by finding "its" solution to its contradictions. In this science-fiction approach, imperialism would have disappeared, having exhausted its historic role, which would have been to transfer capitalism from "this little corner of Europe" to the rest of the world. Imperialism would not have been "the highest stage" of capitalism but only a passing stage in its evolution. But even on this far-fetched assumption, of no real political interest, the question of communism still remains. In a totally homogeneous world where capitalism would have already eliminated nations and national inequalities, the class struggle would have finally achieved the "purity" some people dream of. Unless, of course, in this science fiction world it would be already too late, the reign of unidimensional man rendering the laws discovered by historical materialism a dead letter. If one allows oneself to reason along these lines, then one should carry the arguments through to their logical conclusion, even though it means abandoning the terra firma of actual struggles between real forces operating in a no less real world for a "free" combination of all the possible hypotheses.

More on Westerncentredness.

10. Westerncentredness is the product of capitalism and particularly of its imperialist phase, whence it began to penetrate the working class movement and even the minds of those who claim to be Marxists.

Its "immediate" manifestation is a lack of interest in non-Western societies, which inevitably implies a serious distortion of the history of the West itself. For the West can no more be understood without the East than vice versa, whether in the mercantilist period of the past or for even stronger reasons today, in the imperialist age. The "benefits" derived by the peoples of the West from the imperialist

exploitation of the periphery provided the objective foundations for the penetration of Western-oriented thinking in the working class movement, which thereby really enabled bourgeois ideology to become the ideology of the whole society, something it had only partially been able to achieve prior to imperialism. These "benefits" are not "illusory" simply because the real interest of the proletariat of the centres lies in freeing itself from capitalist exploitation. On the contrary, through the operation of capitalism they are very real : it is imperialist exploitation on a world scale which has made possible "full employment" and the increase in real wages at the centre.

This situation will in the long run have major effects in terms of the socialist transition in the developed centres. Will the peoples of the West be ready to give up imperialism and face up to a necessarily long period of transition before the advantages of their liberation from capitalist compensate them for the difficulties of the change-over, unless they are forced to do so by the liberation of the periphery? The least one can say in that Westerncentredness has the effect of hiding these cultural realities from the peoples of the West. But serious thought on the subject should lead to the conclusion that this is precisely the "ambush" into which the bourgeois imperialists are waiting for the "left" to fall. It is precisely these difficulties which are likely to prove the major stumbling block for any possible breakthrough in the West.

Let me take an example. The Western nations are increasingly "nations of petites bourgeoisies" in that there is a concentration of the middle sections of the population whose functions can only be understood in terms of the operation of the world system, as Poulantzas has so clearly shown. The hypothesis of the unproductive "tertiary sector" today, the possible future concentration of the "quarternary" on the assumption of a new international division of labour relegating certain industries to the periphery (see our other works on the subject)

have as their counterpart the concentration of surplus value generation at the periphery (through direct exploitation at higher rates of surplus value, the formal domination of the "precapitalist" sectors, the plunder of natural resources and so on). The reconversion which the socialist transition will render necessary in the central societies will, in these circumstance, create major difficulties which, of course, the bourgeoisie is already replying on.

The ambiguities in the Western popular and working class movements are a reflection of the opportunist back-stepping in face of these real problems. This can be seen quite clearly today in respect of the Third World's battle for its "economic independence" and increased prices for its raw materials. The question is, who will bear the burden of the superprofits of the monopolies, the working class of the centres or the peoples (including the bourgeoisie) of the periphery? I am perturbed to see the Left of the West unhesitatingly side with imperialism by quoting a Third World alibi (the fact that this battle is led by states and hence the bourgeoisie) as a means of evading its responsibilities. The bourgeoisie has known perfectly well how to exploit this "weakness;" it has had no difficulty in "explaining" that the Western nations have a "right" to the natural riches of the Third World, that the peoples of the West should not foot the bill for the greedy appetites of "sheikhs" and Third World "bureaucrats"... Already, in a short space of time, this imperialist argument has given the right a clear lead, as recent events in Europe have shown. It is very upsetting to see that a considerable section of this extreme "left", which claims to be in the vanguard, shares the same attitudes as the ruling social democrats and revisionists. As for the countries of Eastern Europe, they have clearly joined this same camp (look, for example, at the criticisms levelled at me by the Soviet academicians, which are very close to those of certains "leftists," as well as my comments on this "criticism.").

11. Western-centred thinking imposes a systematic distortion of Marxism. From being an exceptional instrument of revolutionary action, it has almost been turned, by dogmatic rigidity, into a harmless "academic discipline."

The debate on "unequal exchange" has convinced me that the invocation of "the primacy of production over circulation" is nothing but an ideological alibi. For at last, this debate has led to the formulation of problems in terms of production relations, the generation of surplus on a world scale and the world circulation of surplus governed by capitalist production relations operating on a world scale. It is in these terms that it has become possible to establish that the high rates of surplus value at the periphery, the absolute surplus value obtained through formal domination, and reduced or abolished rents are hidden under the cloak of "relative prices." The question is, of course, really one of surplus generation and, at the same time, of the distribution which results from the very process of its generation. This in turn determines the forms of accumulation; unproductive hypertrophy at one pole, the absolute law of pauperisation at the other.

The "anti-circulationist argument" therefore masks - but very poorly - an intention, the refusal to analyse the generation of surplus on a world scale, analysis being confined to the centres alone. This is because it has decreed a priori that surplus value is only produced at the centres and it would be awkward to have to take account of the fact that it is increasingly being produced at the periphery. I am not at all astonished to find the Trotskyites putting forward this argument, well-known as they are for their dogmatic rigidity. An example which is almost a caricature is the work of Kay, who not only ignores the arguments in the debate (see his bibliography) but furthermore naively confesses his intention: to prove that the "poverty" of

the Third World is due not to the fact that it is over-exploited but that it is insufficiently exploited by capital. In other words the law of capitalist accumulation is the raising of the living standards of the masses. The proof: the history of the West. Additional proof? The poverty of the periphery. Kay never asks whether the poverty of the Third World and the "opulence" of the West are in any way related. The relative "stability" of the share of wages in the national income of the West at least means that the rate of surplus value is constant there. For the hypertrophy of unproductive functions, which do not generate surplus value but redistribute it, suggests that the rate is falling. At the periphery, on the other hand, the rate and the volume of surplus value are constantly rising, with productivity increasing much more rapidly than the remuneration of labour. This overwhelming and blinding fact, which ought by rights to have become a commonplace since Lenin, totally escapes the attention of our "Marxist", whose argument, harking back to Rostow who did not see that underdevelopment and development are the two sides of the same coin, would be highly appreciated by the Ford Foundation!

And yet this same attitude is highly implicitly adopted by all those who want to ignore "unequal exchange," in other words, to ignore imperialism. Nine tenths of the people who reject the very idea of "unequal exchange" do not even condescend to discuss the arguments, proving thereby that their attitude is a voluntary one, steaming from ideological resistance. Once again, by way of example, Meillassoux, who devotes not a single line to this fundamental question of imperialism (although it must be said that he is not on his own ground here) seeks for explanations in, of all things, domestic exploitation.

I am forced to say that even Michelet, whose approach is basically the same as ours (the world system taken, from the outset, as the

general framework for surplus value) in a generally excellent work, expresses reservations, albeit based on rather outdated formulations, about the opening of the debate. But he fully shares our view when he writes that multinationalisation "makes extended reproduction possible by shifting the area of exploitation to zones where the rate of surplus value is higher for an identical organic composition," "is accompanied by an integrated structure of the spheres of production and circulation on a world basis" and that "it does not mean the disappearance of the inherent laws of capitalism but rather their world-wide extension."

There remains a great deal of work to be done before the question of how the law of value operates on world economic system scale is exhausted. But I think it is obvious that no progress is likely to be made by a mere repetition of the A B C: the law of value in the "pure" capitalist mode. And yet this is all the "critics" of "unequal exchange" do, a paltry contribution to the debate indeed!

12. That is why the Western-centred "Marxists", having once and for all refused to take any interest in the real field of operation of capitalism - the world system - are forced to take refuge in Marxology. The "theoreticism" and the "Readings of Capital" take the place of an analysis of reality. As Michel Beaud has so rightly pointed out, there is a danger that "theory will be indefinitely derived from theory." Super-specialisation, contrary to the spirit of Marxism (one "specialises in one's "Reading of Capital" to "elaborate on" the "theory of money" or what have you) flatters academic aspirations. Politically, such "Marxists" are always either right-wing or "left-wing" (Trotskyite) revisionists; they are always impervious to the problem of imperialism, which is left for the "specialist" study of others, impervious to outbreaks of Third Worldist fever, to the attractions of ethnographic exoticism and even above feeling, the need to unbosom the spirit of charity. When one is a historicist of this kind, one is concerned with

illustrating and marvellous history of the West and with proving "scientifically (without bothering about reality, which is "derived" from the "Reading") that only Europe could have achieved the progress of Mankind. At last the "white man's burden" has been integrated, even into Marxism! What better proof could there be that the ideology of the ruling class has become the dominant ideology of the society?

Of course, historical materialism has no longer anything to do with all this, it simply "produces" words with which one juggles, with varying degrees of skill (modes of production etc.).

13. Nothing predisposed Marx's ideas for such a mishap. Marx never believed himself to be seen as a prophet. Fortunately he was only a man, who did not see himself as standing outside of time or place. But man's religious spirit has freed his heritage of this modesty. It is forgotten that he had only laid the foundation of historical materialism and discovered the fundamental laws of capitalism. It is forgotten that he did not have any other ambitions, and particularly not that of depriving his successors of the chance of carrying forward the struggle in circumstances which he did not even try to "imagine" far in advance. And the best of his successors, Lenin and Mao, certainly did not deprive themselves of this chance. What could be more heterodox, in the eyes of a rigid dogmatist, than Lenin's and Mao's contributions to Marxism? To me the contribution of Leninism lays primarily in its capacity to operate the Marxist method in the conditions of the new imperialist era. This permitted Lenin to analyse concretely the 2nd International's revisionism, relate it to its objective basis and from there formulate correctly the strategy for the socialist revolution in the new conditions of the unequal development within the imperialist system. As for Marxism, its contribution lays primarily in its capacity to analyse the conditions of the class struggle in the period of transition.

Maoism

Marx was writing between 1840 and 1880; precisely at the time when the bourgeois revolution was moving out of its original small English corner and spreading across Europe. At that time, too, when this upsurge turned the page on the first primitive accumulation period and put an end to the role which the old periphery had played in it; at a time when this first subjection had blocked and even caused the regression of Latin America, Asia and Africa through the genocide of Amerindians, the slave trade, the destruction of Indian and Egyptian industry, the opium traffic imposed on China, to mention just these; at a time when these continents had not yet picked up the threads again under the impact of their integration as a periphery during the imperialist period to follow.

Those who try to ignore all this and, instead, turn parts of sentences, often taken from Marx's notes which he himself had not though worthwhile publishing, into so many "revelations" is, in my view, the most disloyal hommage to Marx it is possible to make, a hommage which virtually embalms him.

## The contradictory nature of the socialist transition

14. Soviet experience teaches us that the socialist transition does not necessarily lead to communism. The debate on the nature and laws of Soviet society is now open. I have maintained that this class society is of a new type because the State centralisation of capital constitutes a qualitative leap. It abolishes some of the essential laws of capitalism which result from the fractioning of capitalist control, and in particular the predominance of the economic infrastructure which is linked to it. It therefore establishes new relations between the economic base and the superstructure, which once again becomes dominant. That is why I felt it useful to give a name to this new class mode. The Chinese Maoists describe it as "State monopoly capitalism" and its ruling class as a "State monopolist bourgeoisie," keeping the expression "monopoly capitalism" to describe

the West. On this basis, they speak of the "restoration of capitalism " I shall come back to the differences which these two forms of expression seem to imply.

But Soviet experience is not the only one of its kind. The political demands expressed by the groups which dominate the working class in the West are very similar in nature. They represent the gradual slide towards the State mode - or to State monopoly capitalism (in the real sense and not that given to it revisionist parties). Serious social democrats (like the Swedes) do not hide from the fact that State Ownership must succeed the fractioned ownership of capital, and neither do the Western communist parties. The Trotskyite heresy is based on the same position. They all share the same cult of the unilateral determination by the "productive forces". The "self-management" tendency has not yet provided answers to the series of basic questions which the transition of socialism in the West would raise, and flounders about in a sea of contraditions, and sometimes naiveties.

Lastly, the experience of the Third World also seems to show that when the bourgeousue appears to be a "rising" class there, it is always as a State bourgeoisie.

Should these similarities lead us to conclude that the State mode would be a possible successor to capitalism? If so, then the class struggle between exploited and exploiters would once again benefit a "third partner" a new class in formation, emerging partly from within the exploited class itself (party and organisation bureaucrats, technicians and the "labour aristocracy" etc), partly from outside it (the new technocrats).

15. Powerful objective forces will certainly work in this direction during the socialist transition. Maoism's specific contribution to Maxism-Leninism has been precisely its development of the theory of the contradictions of the transition.

Of course, this contribution was formulated on the basis of the real, specific conditions prevailing in China. But it was also in part the fruit of a reassessment of Soviet history which moved out of the rut of the false theory of "degeneration", attributed by Trotskyism to the peasant character of Russia, by positively defining the necessary conditions for a worker-peasant alliance (as Grosskopf has so ably and precisely shown). In this sense, Maoism has universal scope and represents real progress, a new step forward.

This scope certainly extends beyond the only experiences to come out of the transition from peripheral capitalism. There is no doubt in my mind that the problems of the possible transition from central capitalism will be neither less serious nor fundamentally different. The same forces working to "a restoration" (or the emergence of a State mode) in peripheral situations will work in the same direction in central situations, because these forces originate in the continuance of commodity relations, the infrastructure of technical organisation and the division of labour during the transition. And then, of course, there are the specific difficulties of central transition mentioned earlier in relation to the elimination of imperialism. But there is so far no social praxis of this transition, the Paris Commune not having endured long enough to confront these problems. I shall therefore limit my comments to the contradictions of the transition in the periphery.

16. Here I refer the reader to other works and to arguments set out in this same paper, and in particular to the discussion on the meaning of self-reliant, independent and popular development (to the strategy of putting industry at the service of agricultural development, to the "three revolutions" of production relations, techniques and culture). Some vital questions remain to be answered, however, no doubt by practice first, although this does not mean one should reject theoretical reflection on these problems which are on the point of

maturing. Among others, there is the question of "autarchy" for small socialist countries and of ~~countries and of~~ cooperation between socialist countries, and even the problem of establishing this co-operation between countries having progressed along the road to their national liberation.

These question have given rise to contradictory views and also to contradictory practices, just as they have to positive debates, in the best sense of the term, leading to formulations in more shaded language. This has been the case of the discussion on the social organisation of the rural world (cooperatives or the strengthening of small commodity production), the debate on the links between "big industry" and "small industry" designed directly to serve the communities, particularly in the rural world, and the discussion which put an end to the myth of the "suicide of the petite bourgeoisie."

But the two basic questions through which the contradictions of the transition are expressed are the question of the State and the national question.

I have already expressed myself on both of these. The persistence of the State during the transition proves the persistence of classes, whose existence depends on the persistence of commodity relations. I am not speaking here, of course, of the vestiges of old classes but above all of the new rising class (whether it is called bourgeois or not). The strong tendency towards anarchism, specific to Western "leftism", obviously distorts the debate on this question.

Similarly, as socialism gains impetus from the breakdown of the imperialist system, ~~the national imperialist system~~ the national phenomenon retains its full impact during the transition. I have already expressed my opinion on this point and, for the same reason, I reject the naive Westerncentred school of thought which, by stressing the "inevitable disappearance of nations," in fact uses this as an alibi for once again ignoring the effects of imperialism.

17. The contradiction of the socialist transition thus lies in the two possible outcomes of the class struggle during the transition: the emergence of a classless society or of a new class society.

Would it in fact be a new class society, or merely the restoration of capitalism? If there is a new mode of production, then the State class society is likely to remain stable for a long period of history, particularly because it will be a mode enabling the productive forces to forge ahead, and hence a progressive mode. The ruling class of this mode will therefore be a rising class. If, on the other hand, it is simply a "restoration" of capitalism, then the State mode will be transitory, unstable, non-progressive, and the hegemony of the ruling class will be nothing more than the final fling of the decadent bourgeoisie.

This fundamental debate is now open. Which of these two possibilities do the facts render most likely? Too little is still known of Soviet society, the analysis of its basic laws having so far been distorted by the desire to find in them, a priori, either an expression of the laws of socialism (even in a "degenerated" form, which does not mean much beyond a short transition stage), or that of the laws of capitalism (leading to a search for an expression of the law of the tendency of the profit rate to fall). But this society seems to be pretty stable, in spite of its own difficulties: no "liberalisation" possible, persistent lagging behind of agriculture, national contrasts, etc. In Eastern Europe, too, Rumania seems to be well settled into a "State" mode. But to judge at least by appearances, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Cuba do not seem to have reached a stable equilibrium. In Egypt, a Third World country which at one time adopted a form of organisation inspired by the same model - albeit in a weak and dependant version of it - experience seems to show that the state mode - which here, truly, did not take its final shape - is likely to be only a stage in the development of capitalism.

The much-neededanalysis of these problems will require, as Gustave Massiah has suggested, a close examination not only of the specific economic laws of these systems and how they operate, but also of the whole system of relations between the economic base and the political and ideological elements of the superstructure which are a feature of these laws.

Only then will it be possible to provide material for an analysis of the functions and mechanisms of the possible "expansionism" of these systems, which will take us a stage further than the present superficial polemics.

## Bibliographical Notes

On the question of the transition to capitalism, reference may be made to the bibliography given earlier, with special reference to the works of Frank, Oliver Cox (Capitalism as a System, Monthly Review Press, 1964), Eric Williams (Capitalisme et esclavage, Présence africaine, 1968) and Wallerstein (op. cit.).

For a report on the discussion on the periods of capitalism and the imperialist break, our works quoted above may be referred to; also G. Dhoquois (Pour l'histoire, Anthropos 1970) and various articles published in L'Homme et la Société (Dhoquois, Palloix and others) and in a C.E.R.M. Cahier (Sur l'impérialisme, duplicated documents, No.85 and 86, 1970).

The history of the national liberation movements has given rise to a wealth of literature, but all too rarely available in Western languages, if one is to judge from the examples of Egypt and the Mashreq.

With regard to China, there is an excellent history by M. Bastid, M.C. Bergère and J. Chesneaux, 3 volumes, published by Hatier, 1976, in which the authors have conveyed the speed with which China moved from the "old movements" (Taiping, Zigiang and Tangwu, Boxer Rebellion) to bourgeois nationalism and communism, starting with the 4th of May Movement. See, too, J. Chesneaux's excellent work entitled Mouvements populaires et sociétés secrètes en Chine aux XIXe et XXe siècles, Maspéro 1970.

We also know now the history of the Vietnamese movement, through the works of Le Thanh Khoi (Le Viet Nam, Histoire et Civilisation, Minuit 1955), Le Chau (Le Viet Nam socialiste: une économie de transition, Maspéro 1966); Nguyen Kien, J. Chesneaux etc... L'histoire du Parti communiste vietnamien by Pierre Rousset (Maspéro 1975) is

distorted by the author's Trostkyist dogmatism. Who, in the West, would have believed that what was happening in Viet Nam in the 1920s and 1930s was decisive? Who would have seen that what was developing there was one of the motors of contemporary history on a world scale?

The argument of American ultra-imperialism has been systematically developed by Stephen Hymer (The Multinational Corporation and the Law of Uneven Development in J.N. Baghwati ed. Economics and the World Order, New York 1972), see too Michael Hudson (Super Imperialism, the Economic Strategy of the American Empire, New York, 1968); R. Vernon (Les entreprises multinationales, Calman-Lévy, 1974) has even further reduced this already economistic argument to the dimensions of the location of industries in relation to the "historic development" of their products. C. Palloix, in a well-documented book (L'économie capitaliste mondial, Maspéro 1972), has visibly been over-inspired by Vernon.

I have criticised Gérard Chaliand, Mythes révolutionnaires du Tiers Monde, Le Seuil, 1976. For a history of the past 25 years, see David Horowitz, From Yalta to Viet Nam, 2 vols. See also Gustave Massiah's paper in Amin, Faire, Hussein and Massiah, La crise de l'impérialisme, op. cit.

For the debate on "unequal exchange," we refer the reader to our above-mentioned works and to L'Homme et la Société, No. 39-40 (containing our criticisms of the Soviet Acadmey of Science and C. Meillassoux, together with our comments). I have also referred to N. Poulantzas (Les classes sociales dans le capitalisme contemporain, Le Seuil, 1974), G. Kay, Development and Underdevelopment: A Marxist Analysis, London 1976, and Charles Albert Michalet (Le capitalisme mondial, PUF, 1976).

On the contribution of Maoism, see Pierre Amon, Révolution culturelle et dialectique du centre et de la périphérie, in Sociologie et Révolution 10-18, 1974), and already quoted works by Bettelheim, Liebman and Groskopf.

Some of my own views expressed in a few of the discussions within the national liberation movement have been published (see Impérialisme et sous-développement en Afrique, particularly Chapter III-I on the class struggle in Africa, Chapter II-VI on African unity; I have altered my position on some points in the course of these discussions). See also La nationa arabe, pp. 151 onwards.

On my own arguments with regard to the "Soviet mode of production see Le développement inégal, pp. 325 onwards. The viewpoint of the Chinese Maoists has been published in L'imperialisme aujourd'hui, ed. du centenaire 1974.

On the national question in the transition, see La Nation arabe pp. 113 onwards.