

Towards the Fifth International?

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Capitalism is a world-wide system. Therefore, its victims cannot effectively meet its challenges unless they organise themselves at the same global level. Yet "the Internationalism of the Peoples" has always had to confront serious difficulties produced by the unequal development associated with the globalisation of capital. Here I propose to identify the origin and nature of the obstacles that impede the construction of a convergence within the variety of the class struggles, and the dominated, oppressed and exploited peoples.

Objective reasons for the diversity within global capitalism

Capitalism as an essential mode of production that defines the modern times is based on the axial class conflict between labour and capital. The centrality of this concept is at the origin of the proletarian character proclaimed by the international organisations of the popular classes engaged in anticapitalist social struggles, and in the socialist (or communist) horizons in which the proletariat in question has defined its liberation. Therefore I find that it is all together natural that the proletarian International originated in the advanced centres of the system of global capitalism, in Western Europe, in the 19th century.

Yet because of the imperialist character of the global expansion of capitalism the affirmation of this dominating reality has also contributed hiding other characteristics of social struggles in the peripheries of the system.

The diversity of social conditions and policies of the states and nations that constitute the global system is a consequence of the nature of the developments that characterise the global capitalist expansion, and more specifically, (i) the inherent contrast between centres and peripheries in this development (in other words, the essentially imperialist nature of this expansion in all phases of its history), and (ii) the multiplicity of centres constituted as historic nation states, which engage in a permanent competition that positions one against the other. Despite their being subordinated to the demands of the accumulation in the centres of this system, the social formations of the peripheries have never been marked by the central position of the workers' proletariat in the whole organisation of production. Here the peasant societies and - to varying degrees - many other classes and social groups are also major victims of the system.

During the entire course of their formation, the nations were always marked by their own particularities, regardless of their being dominating or dominated. The hegemonic blocs of classes and interests that have helped capital to establish its dominance, as well as the blocs that the victims of the system have built or tried to build to meet the challenge have therefore always been different from one country to another and one era to another. This has created particular political cultures which articulate value systems and "traditions" of expression, organisation and struggle in their own ways. These, as well as the culture in which they are expressed, are all objective diversities. Finally, the development of the forces of production through scientific and technological revolutions have led to changes in the organisation of work and the various forms of subordination to capitalist exploitation.

Taken together, these diverse realities make it impossible to reduce political actors to bourgeoisie and proletariat. That simplification might work in polemical rhetoric, but is useless for the elaboration of an effective policy. Because of its objectivity, the diversity results in a segmentation of the working classes and the dominated and exploited peoples, generating the weakening of their resistance and even of their offensive struggles whenever they succeed in changing the relations of force to their own advantage.

The diversity does not help to bring about a natural convergence of struggles against what only afterwards will be seen as the principal adversary. On the contrary, it causes potentially negative conflicts of interest between, for instance, urban and rural workers (over the prices of food products), or between nations (or dominating national blocs).

The strategies of reproduction of the dominant powers often successfully exploit the negative effects of the segmentation of interests and struggles. The flexibility of capitalism, that is often analysed as being an expression of its exceptional power (in comparison with the rigidity - effective or mythical- of other systems), is only the practical consequence of its reproduction as the dominant pole under the conditions of diversity and permanent evolution.

Nationalism frequently strengthens the successes of the strategies of capital and the hegemonic bloc of which it is the leader. In the centres of the imperialist system, this happens by way of rallying the political forces that benefit from the support of the working classes to the global strategies of the dominant classes. The colonisation and the imperialist domination were legitimised in this way, yesterday by the discourse about the "civilizing mission", today by many of those who pretend to export democracy and defend human rights everywhere. The socialist parties and the social democrats have often practiced this alignment and deserved the qualification of social-colonialists (or social-imperialists). This applies to the case of the social-liberal atlanticists of contemporary Europe. Nationalism has sometimes also been aggravated by inter-imperialist conflicts. As we know, the working classes (at least the parties who represent them) have rallied behind their respective bourgeoisies in major conflicts, as happened during the First World War.

By contrast, the situation in the dominated peripheries typically generates reactions calling for national liberation. These are perfectly legitimate and positive when seen through a long-term perspective to abolish exploitation and oppression. But they also entail dangers and illusions. The position of the representatives of the exploiting class may become too strong within the liberation front, or later.

This is a major and permanent problem in the globalised system of capitalism. The system, which is imperialist by its nature, produces and reproduces the contrast between imperialist centres and dominated peripheries and therefore imposes the national struggle as the necessary step towards further social progress.

The historic lessons of the socialist and communist Internationals

The diversity of the conditions of reproduction of the different partners of global capitalism has always constituted a major challenge to the success of struggles conducted by the victims of the system. The Internationals of the workers' movement were conceived precisely to surmount this major obstacle.

After a century and a half of the history of the Internationals it would be useful to draw some lessons which may clarify the present challenges and the options for strategic action.

The first International, which was called the International Working Mens' Association, was created precisely to surmount the national dispersion of which the European revolutions of 1848 had showed the negative effects. The new social subject, the primary victim of the expansion of capitalism in Western and Central Europe, which had expressed its socialist or communist dreams in the year 1848, ended up being broken by the counter-revolution. It called itself "the proletariat" which at that time was composed of a minority assembled in the large factories and mines of the era, and a large circle of handicraft workers. The new proletarian class was exclusively localised in the North West region of Europe and spreading to the United States, meaning that the possibility of an intervention of the International made itself felt only within the borders of this region.

Despite its limitations, the first International was able to manage the diversity of social and political struggles in a democratic spirit which placed it at the forefront of its generation. The association brought together organisations of varying nature and status, (embryonic) political parties, unions and cooperatives, civic associations and personalities (like Marx, Proudhon, Bakunin!). Their range of intervention, analysis of challenges, strategies, visions and mobilising ideologies were diverse - extremely so. The limitations of the ideas of this generation are easily enumerated: the patriarchal notion of the relations between men and women, the ignorance towards the rest of the world etc. We could also thrash out one more time the nature of the conflicting ideologies (infant Marxism, anarchism, workers' spontaneity et cetera), of their relevance and efficacy and so on, but this is certainly not the objective of this paper. We should keep the only lesson given by the first experience: the democratic respect for the principle of diversity. This is an important lesson for us today.

The Second International was conceived on wholly different principles. The accelerated proletarianisation of the epoch had given birth to new forms of workers' parties with relatively important numbers of followers and influences on the working classes. The parties differed in many ways, going from English labour to the Marxist social democrats of Germany to the French revolutionary trade unionism. Nevertheless these parties rallied - at least at the beginning - to the objective of substituting the capitalist order with socialism. However, of greater importance was the principle of "one" single party for each country, "the" party that was supposed to be the exclusive representative of "the" class which in itself was seen as the unique historical subject of social transformation, "the" party that was potentially the bearer of "the correct line", regardless of whether the party opted for - as history was later to show - moderate reform or revolution. Engels and the first Marxist leaders (Kautsky, Labriola and others) certainly considered these options as proof of progress in relation to the First International, as they probably were, at least in part. The new generation of leaders of the International did not always ignore the dangers of the main options of the time, as some were too hastily to observe (but that is not a matter of discussion in this paper). Still the limits to democratic practices in the political and social movements which were inspired by the parties of the Second International stemmed from these original fundamental options.

On the whole these parties drifted towards imperialism and nationalism. The Second International very rarely addressed the colonial question and imperialist expansion. It often legitimised imperialism by claiming that its consequences were "objectively" positive (that it forced retarded people to enter into capitalist modernity). This historical perspective,

however, was refuted by the imperialist nature inherent in the global expansion of capitalism. "Social imperialist" is an apt description of this alignment of the social democratic parties with the linear bourgeois economism (with which I pretend that Marxism has nothing in common), and continued to be one of their features up until the period after the second world war with their rallying atlanticism and subsequently social liberalism.

The drift towards imperialism reinforced the chances of a parallel alignment with the nationalistic visions of the leaders of capitalism, at least regarding international relations. As is well known, the parties of the Second International foundered in the chauvinism produced by the First World War.

The Third International was created to correct this drift, and it did at least partially. It did in fact make its presence felt globally, supporting the creation of communist parties in all the peripheries of the world system and proclaiming the strategic character of the alliance of the "Workers of the West" with the "Peasants of the East". Maoism expressed this development when it enlarged the call for internationalism to include the "oppressed peoples" at the side of the "workers of the world". Later the alliance between the Third International (which had become Kominform), the Non-Aligned Movement following Bandung (1955) and the Tricontinental (1966) reinforced the idea and the practices of the globalisation of anticapitalist struggles on a truly world scale.

Even so, the Third International not only conserved the organisational options of the Second, but also reinforced its traits: one "single" party per country, and that party being the bearer of the one and only "correct" line and the catalyst of all the demands the trade unions and mass organisations considered as "transmission belts".

In addition, the Third International found itself in a situation that was unknown to the First or the Second: it had to protect the first socialist state, and later the camp of the socialist states. How this necessity evolved and what (negative) effects it had, in relation to the evolution of the Soviet system itself, is not the object of this paper.

The Fourth International, which reacted against this evolution, did not bring innovations with respect to the forms of organisation initiated by the Third, to the origins of which it only wanted to return.

Bandung and the first globalisation of struggles (1955-1980)

The governments and the people of Asia and Africa proclaimed in Bandung in 1955 their desire to reconstruct the global system on the basis of recognition of the rights of nations that until then had been dominated. The "right to development" set the foundation for a pattern of globalisation that was to be realised through multipolar negotiations, therefore compelling imperialism to adjust itself to the new demands. The success of Bandung - and not its failure, as is often thoughtlessly proclaimed - is at the origin of the enormous leaps forward by the people of the South in the domains of education and health, of the construction of the modern State and the reduction of social inequalities, and move into the era of industrialisation. Of course, the limitations of these gains, especially the democratic deficit of the national populist regimes who "gave to the peoples" but never allowed them to organise themselves, must be considered seriously in the balance sheet of the epoch.

The Bandung system related itself to two other characteristic systems of the period following

the second World War, the Soviet (and Maoist) system and the Welfare State of the Western social democrats. These systems were certainly in competition and even in conflict (although the conflicts were not allowed to escalate beyond certain local limits), but they were certainly also complementary. In this situation it makes sense to talk about global struggles, since, for the first time in the history of capitalism struggles took place in all the regions of the planet and inside all the nations and interacted.

The proof of interdependence of the struggles and the historic compromises which assured the stability in the management of concerned societies came with the developments that followed the erosion of the potential in the three systems. The collapse of the Soviet system sparked the real social advances of the social democratic model which were the only possible way of facing the "communist challenge". The echo of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Europe in 1968 should also be remembered.

The progress of industrialisation beginning in the era of Bandung was not a result of the unfolding of imperialism but was imposed by the victories of the peoples of the South. Without doubt this progress fed the illusion of a "catching up", but imperialism, which had to adjust itself to the development of the peripheries, in reality rebuilt itself around new forms of domination. The old dichotomy between imperialist/dominated countries which was a synonym to the dichotomy of industrialised/non industrialised countries became slowly replaced by a new dichotomy founded on "the five new monopolies" of the imperialist centers: the control of new technology, natural resources, financial flows, information and weapons of mass destruction.

The accomplishments of the period as well as their limits take us back to the central question of the future of the bourgeoisie and capitalism in the peripheries of the system. This is an enduring question in as much as the global unfolding of capitalism, by its polarising effects due to its imperialist nature, leads to a basic inequality between the center and the periphery with respect to a potential bourgeois and capitalist development. In other words, is the bourgeoisie of the peripheries constrained to subject itself to the requirements of this unequal development? Is it necessarily a comprador bourgeoisie? Is the capitalist road, in these conditions, necessarily a dead end? Or does the margin of autonomy that the bourgeoisie in certain circumstances has at its disposal (a margin that needs to be specified) allow a national capitalist development which is autonomous and able to advance in the direction of the "catching up"? Where are the limits of these possibilities? At which point do these limits force us to qualify the capitalist option as an illusion?

Several doctrinaire and one-sided responses to these questions have been offered, first in one and then in the opposite direction, but in the end they were always adjusting to evolutions that had neither been foreseen correctly by the dominating forces nor by the popular classes. In the aftermath of the second World War the Communism of the Third International qualified all the bourgeoisies of the South as comprador, and Maoism proclaimed that the road to liberation could only be opened by socialist revolution which proceeded by stages and was directed by the proletariat and its allies (the rural working classes in particular), and especially by their avant-garde, the Communist party. Bandung set out to prove that this judgment was hasty and that under the direction of the bourgeoisie a hegemonic national populist bloc was capable of bringing about some of the desired development. However, once the neoliberal offensive of the oligopolies of the imperialist center (the triad: United States, Europe, Japan) had put an end to the Bandung era in the 1980s the bourgeoisies of the South appeared again to be ready to adopt a subordinate comprador role and to accept unilateral adjustment (this

adjustment of the peripheries to the center is in a way the inverse of the adjustment of the centers to the peripheries during the era of Bandung). But this reversal of tendency had barely occurred before a new window of opportunity for the national capitalist option again seemed to open in the so called "emerging countries", especially in China, but also in other countries such as India and Brazil. Without a deepened analysis of these potential advances and their contradictions and limits it will not be possible to build effective strategies of convergence of the local and global struggles.

New era, new challenges?

The era of the Internationals and of Bandung has come to an end.

The three dominating systems of the period following the Second World War no longer exist. This has paved the way for a triumphant capitalist offensive. Capitalism and imperialism have entered into a new phase with qualitatively new features. The task of identifying these transformations and their real significance should be at the center of our debate. Important works on these questions already exist but discussing them and their conclusions is not the object of this paper.

Let me recall some central theses which I have advanced concerning these transformations:

(i) the transformations of the organisation of work and of the stratification of classes and social groups in relation to the technological revolution in progress (information, genetic, space, nuclear) and to the accelerated industrialisation in the emerging peripheries has resulted in a set of multiple social and political actors which are articulated in a new manner in their possible conflicts and alliances. The precise identification of these new subjects of the social transformation, of their interests and their aspirations, of their visions of the challenges and of the responses that they have brought, of the conflicts that separate them and make obstacles for their convergence in their diversity, is the first condition for a fruitful debate on local and global strategy.

(ii) The center/periphery opposition is no longer a synonym of the dichotomy industrialised countries/non industrialised countries. The polarisation of centers/peripheries that gave the expansion of global capitalism its imperialistic character continues and even deepens because of the above-mentioned "five new monopolies" enjoyed by the imperialist centers. Under these conditions the projects for accelerated development, which have been undertaken with immediate and indisputable success in the emerging peripheries (in China in the first place, but also in other countries of the South) cannot abolish the imperialist domination. These projects contribute to the establishment of a new center/periphery dichotomy, but it does not surpass it.

(iii) The noun imperialism is no longer to be conjugated in the plural like it used to be in previous historical periods. From now on it is a "collective imperialism" of the triad (United States, Europe, Japan). This means that the common interests of the oligopolies which are based in the triad are stronger than their eventual conflicting ("commercial") interests. This collective nature of imperialism expresses itself through the use of the common instruments of the triad in the management of the global system: at the economic level, the WTO (Colonial Ministry of the triad), the IMF (collective Colonial Monetary Agency), the World Bank (Propaganda Ministry), the OECD and the European Union (conceived to prevent Europe abandoning liberalism); at the political level, the G7/G8, the US Army and NATO, its

instrument, (the marginalisation/domestication of the UN completes the picture).

(iv) the hegemonic project of the United States, which operates through a programme of military control over the planet (which among other things implies the abrogation of international law and self-proclaimed right of Washington to wage preventive wars whenever it wants to), articulates itself in the collective imperialism and gives the US leadership the means to overcompensate for its economic weaknesses.

I would also like to briefly mention the main conclusions of some further reflections on these on-going transformations of capitalism:

(i) It is said that the scientific revolution will lead to the replacement of types of work which are done under vertical hierarchies of command with "network organisations" of free individuals. In this new science-dominated mode of production the individual is thought to become the real subject of history taking over the tasks of the previous historic subjects, such as the classes and nations.

(ii) Furthermore, it is being maintained that the era of imperialism has come to an end and that, in the present post-imperialist globalisation system, the "center is everywhere and nowhere". In accordance with this idea, confrontations between multiple economic and social powers have replaced those of the states, which in earlier times made up the framework for relatively stable blocs of hegemonic power.

(iii) Emphasis is being put on the "financialisation" of the management of the new "patrimonial" capitalism, which is not analysed in terms of specific conjunctural phenomena belonging to the present moment of "transition" (a transition that leads to a new system whose nature is therefore in itself an object of discussion), but as stable features of the new system being built.

I am not hiding the fact that I, for my part, have strong reservations with regard to these theses. What I propose in the following is not a thorough discussion of these questions - indisputably necessary - but only to make some observations concerning the political method which is needed to make these debates serve the positive construction of an alternative based on the principle of convergence in the diversity.

How to "do politics"?

Following the end of the 20th century the new generation of militants and the movements definitely rejected the way of doing politics that had characterised the earlier critical movements on the left (in particular the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Internationals). The traditional way is justly reproached for the not so democratic practices on which it was built: the refusal of diversity, the pretence of one or another to hold the secret of a "correct line" that has been deduced by way of "scientific" (and thus impeccable) analysis, the excessive centralisation of the organisation and the power of decision (in parties, unions and associated movements) and the ensuing fatal bureaucratic and doctrinaire deviations. The concept of the "avant-garde" is considered to be dangerous and is, by consequence, rejected.

This criticism should be taken seriously and accepted in its essential parts. In this sense the principle opening for the diversity, and for the democratic way of handling the diversity, which is at the origin of the convergence of "social movements" in the global, regional and

national "social Forums" should be respected strictly.

The diversity in question is multidimensional, and concerns the theory and the practice.

The diversity of explicit or implicit analysis is not only present in the wide range of the contemporary movements but also very often within the particular movements. In order to have an idea of this diversity one may take a look at the extreme positions held by the one or another concerning the relation between theory and practice.

At one extreme we find those who put forward a (probably simplified) Leninist thesis, affirming that the "theory" (that has to be as "scientific", that is to say true, as possible) must be conveyed to the movement from "the outside". Others substitute or associate the theory with the dream world of a creative utopia. At the other extreme, are those who state that the future can only be the natural and almost spontaneous result of a movement which is free from concerns about systematic formulations in advance.

Accepting this diversity certainly means tolerating the whole range of opinions which, in turn, means adopting the perspective that the future is produced both by means of pre-formulated concepts and by the movement. For my part, I define the objective - that I will continue to call socialism/communism - as the simultaneous product of the theory and the practice, the product of their gradual convergence. This proposal does not imply a theory that has been ordained "correct" a priori, nor any predefined vision of the final goal.

I will go even farther and propose that we admit that the diversity concerns both the visions of the future themselves and their ethical and cultural foundations. "Marxism" (in the singular or plural), "radical reformism", "liberation theology", "anarchism", "radical ecologism", "radical feminism" all have their place in the necessary effort to build a convergence in the diversity.

This being so, organising the convergence while respecting the diversity does not exclude debate between opposing points of view, but implies it, on the condition that the aim of the confrontation is not to cast the miscreants out.

Having reached this point, I should like to formulate my own propositions. In itself and in its spontaneity, the movement cannot produce any desirable future; it does not provide an exit from chaos. All the more so if the movement declares itself to be apolitical. We know that, for perfectly respectable ethical reasons and because history provides real examples of how "power corrupts", part of the movement rejects the idea that it should "come to power". The enthusiasm for the Neozapatism of subcomandante Marcos stemmed, for a good part, from this position which, undoubtedly, is sometimes justifiable. However, it cannot form the basis of a general rule that may be applied in the future (or even in the present situation). More generally, the apolitical option which Hardt and Negri have formulated (together with - not by chance - their "post imperialist" thesis) is naive at best; at worst it signals that they are accepting the notion of an apolitical civil society belonging to reactionary US political culture.

The way of doing politics which I believe is needed to challenge the present capitalistic/imperialistic system and to produce a positive alternative consists of treating the diversity like the First International did, and not like it was treated in the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals. By the way, I find that the debates within the First International show a striking analogy with those within the World Social Forum.

Objectives and means of a strategy for convergence in diversity

My starting point is that the system in place (capitalism in the era of the collective imperialism of the triad under the command of the US leader, supported by subordinate bourgeoisies of the South) is not sustainable.

Capitalism has reached a stage in its development where its victim (its adversary) is no longer exclusively the class of proletarians whose work it exploits; rather it is all of humanity whose survival it threatens. At this stage the system deserves to be called senile and therefore its only future is to cede its place to "another world" that may be better or worse.

From now on, the further accumulation of capital actually requires the destruction of peasant societies (in which half of humanity lives) through a policy of "enclosures" that is being implemented on a planetary scale. Yet the system does not have the capacity of absorbing the peasants whom it has chased from the fields into industrial activities. It also leads to the rapid exhaustion of non renewable resources, to the accelerated destruction of biodiversity, and to exacerbating the threat on present ecological balance essential for the reproduction of life on the Planet. A consequence of the devaluation of the labour force is that a greater contribution is demanded from the women who do the care work. We could continue the list of areas where the destructive consequences of capitalist expansion vastly predominate over its creative effects. The pursuit of capital accumulation has become an obstacle to the production of wealth made possible by the development of science and technology.

This evolution signifies that the historic subject which is the bearer of the desired transformation must henceforth be conceived in the plural. The movements of resistance and protest are intervening in a growing number of areas. But this plurality of anticapitalistic subjects which is the expression of a potentially invincible power of social movements is, at the same time, the manifestation of the immediate weakness of that same movement. The sum of the demands - however legitimate they may be, and they are legitimate - and of the struggles conceived in their name, do not constitute an efficient alternative that is needed to unleash a series of successive advances.

Thus the challenge is serious and will only be surpassed on the condition that a victorious coalition, an alternative hegemonic bloc, is formed.

The challenge is such that those who want to act efficiently can hardly satisfy with immediate and partial responses (in order to achieve "Capitalism with a human face"), without a perspective that goes "beyond" Capitalism. Without doubt every strategy of the real struggles must include objectives for the short term and others for the long term, in order to be able to identify the steps in the progression of the movement. The mere affirmation of a far off objective (like for example "socialism") is not only insufficient, but also may be discouraging. Immediate goals must be set up and action organised to guarantee that the militant mobilisations achieve victories. But this is not sufficient. It is evermore necessary to re-establish the legitimacy and the credibility of a long perspective, that of socialism/communism.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet system, when China abandoned Maoism to engage in the path we know, and when the populist regimes of the Bandung era went off

course, even the term Socialism lost all its sense of credibility and legitimacy. Because they had gradually engaged in mediocre, disgraceful and sometimes criminal activities and lived in the midst of lies and a crooked, repetitive rhetoric, the regimes which had emerged from revolutions made in the name of Socialism, and the state powers that had been established by the victorious national liberation movements, are responsible for this collapse of hope, which capitalism immediately profited on. No wonder the re-emerging "movement" of the 1990s accepted capitalism as the impassable horizon of the foreseeable future (if not the end of history) and choose to ignore imperialism's violations of the rights of nations.

But it is time to understand that this moment should be transcended. It is time to be radical. It is time to comprehend that the savage neoliberal offensive only reveals the true face of capitalism and of imperialism.

In this frame the issue of the European institutions poses a central challenge to Europe. These institutions were conceived to forever set Europe on the road of economic liberalism and political atlanticism, and the Commission is, in this sense, the perfect guarantor of the durability of power of the European reaction. The call for "another Europe" or "a social Europe" is a pure incantation as long as this institutional construct is not thoroughly questioned.

The European institution annihilated state sovereignty, without which democracy turns into a surreal farce. State sovereignty has not been substituted by a federal power or confederation, the necessary conditions for that are lacking anyway. It obviously reduced the real Europe to a European dimension of the American political project (atlanticism and the decisive role of NATO, led by Washington, in the foreign policy of Europe). And as long as the action of the collective imperialism of the Triad continues the present liberal globalisation, the European institution will serve as one of its instruments.

The "plural left", as it is called in Europe, is certainly not the means whereby the peoples of this continent can reach the end of the tunnel. It is built on the principle of "alternation" with the right, within limits imposed by the liberal and atlanticist European institutions (and therefore it is not an alternative). The reconstruction of "another left" is a condition without which it is difficult to imagine that Europe could be ruled by the European peoples. Will contradictions between "Europe" and the United States manifest themselves with growing force? Some find economic conflicts of interest between the dominant firms in the two countries/regions to be highly probable. I am not persuaded by this argument. I believe that the contradiction lies elsewhere in the contrast between the political culture of Europe and that of the United States that will lead to a political conflict of which the first manifestations are already visible. In my opinion, the new upsurge of the European political cultures, which are threatened by "americanisation", can result in the rebirth of a left which is up to the challenge, that is to say, an anti-liberal and anti-atlanticist left.

On the other hand the peoples of the three continents (Asia, Africa, Latin America) are today confronted with a system, in many respects analogous, with that in place at the end of the Second World War: a colonial system that does not recognise their sovereign rights, and which imposes on them an economic system that suits the expansion of the oligopolies of the imperialist centres, and corresponding political systems. The expansion of the so called neoliberal global imperialist system is nothing less than the construction of "apartheid on a global scale".

At Bandung in 1955, the nations and states of Asia and Africa responded to this same challenge. Those States had come into existence after the victory of revolutions made under the banner of socialism or powerful liberation movements, and which therefore benefited from of an established legitimacy. The coalitions that constituted the revolutionary blocs, and the national liberation movements, always included important bourgeois segments aspiring to become the rulers of new society, even if they could not rule alone. This bourgeois dimension of Bandung, which manifested itself in the vision of economic development typical of the time, rehabilitated the "national bourgeoisie" whose historic role appeared to have come to its end in the early postwar period. The decades of the Bandung era were deeply marked by the tension between the ambitions of these bourgeois elements and the aspirations of the popular classes.

The new imperialist order will be challenged. By whom? Who will challenge it? What will be the result? These are the questions which the states and the peoples of the periphery will have to answer.

The ruling classes of the South have largely accepted the role of the subordinate comprador. They are not capable of questioning the dominating reality. The peoples, who are engaged in the daily struggle for survival, also seem ready to accept their lot, or, worse, swallow new illusions that the same ruling classes are feeding them (political Islam is the most dramatic example). But on the other side the mobilisation of movements of resistance and the struggles against capitalism and imperialism across the three continents, the successes and electoral victories of the new lefts in Latin America (whatever limits those victories may have), the progressive radicalisation of many of these movements, the critical positions that the governments of the South are beginning to take in the WTO, all prove that "another world", better than the present one, is becoming possible.

An offensive strategy is needed for the reconstruction of the front of the peoples of the South. This requires a radicalisation of the social resistance to imperialist capital.

It requires the politicisation of the resistance, the capacity to make the struggles of peasants, women, workers, the unemployed, the "informals", democratic intellectuals converge and assign to the entire popular movement objectives for democratisation and social progress (these are indissolubly associated) that are possible in the present term and in the long term. It requires that the values which give this movement legitimacy are applicable universally (in a socialist perspective), therefore surpassing cleavages which oppose peoples of the South to each others (Muslims and Hindus for example). Para-religious or para-ethnic "culturalisms" (for instance political Islam, political Hinduism) cannot be allies in the fight for an alternative to imperialism. On the contrary, they are the principal reactionary allies of the dominating imperialist forces.

Without excluding that the mobilisation and the advances that the popular struggles can produce will inflect the policies of the powers in place in the countries of the South, or even change these powers to the better. Such inflections are beginning to show in, for instance, the formation of the Group of Twenty and the Group of 99 within the WTO, even if this crystallisation of diverse (converging or diverging) interests may entail ambiguities.

The ruling classes of certain countries of the South have visibly opted for another strategy. Their strategy is neither one of passive submission to the dominant forces in the global system, nor one of declared opposition. It is a strategy of active interventions followed by a

hope for accelerated development of their countries.

China was better equipped than others to make this choice and achieve incontestably brilliant results. China benefited from the solidity of its nation as a result of the revolution and Maoism, from the decision to keep control over its currency and its capital flows, and from its refusal to abandon the State ownership of land (the main acquisition of the peasant revolution). Can this experience be continued? And what are its limits? The analysis of the contradictions of this option brings me to the conclusion that the project of a national capitalism capable of imposing itself as an equal with the major powers of the global system is largely built on illusions. The objective conditions inherent in its history do not permit such a historic social compromise between capital, workers and peasants that would guarantee the stability of the system. The system will necessarily slide towards the right (and will therefore confront a growing social movement of the popular classes), or evolve towards the left, building a "market socialism" as one step in the long transition towards socialism.

The apparently analogous choices of the ruling classes in other "emergent" countries are even more fragile. Neither Brazil nor India are capable of resisting with enough force the combination of imperialism and local reactionary classes, because they have not made a radical revolution like China. That WTO made these two governments take side with the liberal globalisation (in Hong Kong in December, 2005) incontestably aided imperialism to avoid the disaster that was waiting for it, and dealt a hard blow to the emerging front of the countries of the South. This supreme error - if it is not something worse - only serves the interests of the most reactionary local classes (the Brazilian and Indian big land owners!) who are imperialism's natural allies and sworn enemies of the popular classes of these countries. The hopes that a part of the historic left of Latin America has invested in the social democratic model are founded on a major error of assessment: European social democracy was able to make its achievements because it could turn social-imperialist. That is not a viable option under the conditions of Brazil and the other countries of the South.

Towards a Fifth International?

The globalisation of capitalism's strategies creates the need for a counter-strategy of its victims. Should we conclude that a new International is needed to assure the convergence of the struggles of the people against capital?

I do not hesitate to give a positive answer to this question, on the condition that the envisioned new International is conceived in the same way as the First, but not as the Second, the Third, or the Fourth Internationals. It should be a socialist/communist International open to all who want to act together to create convergence in diversity. Socialism (or Communism) would thus be seen as the product of the movement, and not as something that is deduced from a previous definition. This proposition does not exclude the formulation of theoretical concepts for the society to come. Instead, it evokes precise formulations of such concepts, and it excludes the monopoly of one concept to the right way and phases of transition.

It is certainly difficult to achieve these fundamental democratic principles. The exercise of democracy is always difficult. We should draw "limits", accept that defining the strategic objectives implies making choices, and that there is no predetermined way of handling the relation of a majority to one or more minorities.

In order not to go against the principles that I just formulated, I shall not try to answer these

questions. I shall only propose some major strategic goals for the battle ahead, arranging them in three sections:

(i) Roll back liberalism at all levels, nationally and globally. To this end, a number of immediate goals can be formulated, for instance, the exclusion of agriculture from the agenda of the WTO, the abrogation of decisions by the imperialist powers on intellectual and technological property rights, the abrogation of decisions that hamper the development of a non-commercial management of natural resources and public services, the abrogation of the bans on regulation of capital flows, the proclamation of the right of states to cancel debts that, after audit, are proved to be immoral or despicable, etc.

(ii) Dismantle the programme of military control over the planet by the military forces of the United States and/or of NATO. The repudiation of international law by the United States, and the "authorisation" that it gives itself to conduct preventive wars, must be condemned without reservations. The functions of the UN must be restored. There must be an unconditional and immediate withdrawal of the occupying army stationed in Iraq, and of the Israeli administration of the occupied Palestine. All military bases of the United States that are dispersed across the continents must be dismantled. As long as this project to control the planet is not morally, diplomatically, politically and militarily defeated, any democratic and social advances of the people will remain vulnerable and under the threat of being bombed by the US Air Force.

(iii) Repeal the liberal and atlanticist conceptions upon which the institutions of the European Union are based. This implies reconsidering the whole European institutional framework and the dissolution of NATO.

Initiatives aiming at formulating a strategy of convergence corresponding to the general vision proposed here, have already been taken. In Bamako, 18 January, 2006, on the eve of the polycentric World Social Forum (Bamako and Caracas), one day was consecrated to debates on the strategy and construction of convergence in diversity. The fact that this meeting could be held and that it produced interesting results shows that the global social movement is already moving in this direction.

The sketched Fifth International, or more modestly, the strategic actions proposed in the *Bamako Appeal* which I am here referring to, should contribute to the construction of the internationalism of the peoples. It should embrace all peoples from North to South, not only the proletariat, but all social classes and popular strata that are victims of the system, thus humankind as a whole, whose survival is threatened. The proposed internationalism should strengthen and complete "another internationalism", namely, the solidarity between the peoples on the three continents (Asia, Africa, Latin America) against the aggressive imperialism of the triad. The solidarity of the people in the North and in the South cannot be based on charity. It should be based on common action against imperialism.

The reinforcement of the internationalism of the peoples will facilitate advancements in three directions that, taken together, form the alternative: social progress, democratisation, and strengthening of national autonomy through a negotiated globalisation.

Who will subscribe to this perspective? At this point we must return to the question of "limits". The Fifth International should not be an assembly only for political parties; it should welcome all organisations and resistance movements of the people and guarantee both their

voluntary participation in the construction of common strategies and their independence of decision-making. Thus political parties (or their fractions) should certainly not be excluded. Whether we like it or not, the parties remain important gathering points for civic action.

The fundamental principle may be formulated in the following two complimentary sentences: (i) no socialism without democracy (and therefore no progress towards socialism without democratic practices); (ii) no democratic progress without social progress.

Thus it becomes understandable that not just a few, small groups of political extremists and some good-willed NGOs will join this perspective. Many big movements of struggle (trade unions, peasant associations, womens' organisations, citizens' movements) know from experience that "there is strength in numbers". The parties of the Third and Fourth Internationals will also find themselves a place, if they stop being self-proclaimed avant-gardes! Many democratic, social and anti-imperialist parties of the peripheries will certainly understand the advantages of coordinated anti-imperialist struggles. Unfortunately, the parties of the second International that take side with liberalism and atlanticism have excluded themselves from this prospect.

This is not the place to go further into the issue of the "conditions" for membership (in analogy with the famous 21 conditions to be filled by the members of the Third International). Serious debates on these principles and the statutes of the International are indispensable. We only ask to start reflecting on these issues.

The World Social Forum will certainly count as one of the friends of this International, if it comes into existence. The fundamental democratic principle of the WSF - that everybody who accepts its Charter is welcomed without reservation - makes it possible for the members of the new International to co-exist with organisations that contribute to the convergence in diversity even if they do not adhere to a socialist perspective, as well as with organisations that decide not to participate in the formulation of common strategies. This diversity gives strength to the movement and should be preserved.

Nevertheless the idea of a Fifth International has its adversaries, and their number will increase if it becomes a reality. There are already those who wish to maintain the WSF in a state of maximal impotence. The ideologies by which they want to legitimise the inactivity are well known. One of their propositions is the pretended equivalence of the diversity of the Forum and that of the self-proclaimed "plural left" (in Europe, principally). Another is the thesis of the "apolitical civil society" (or even "anti-political civil society"). This thesis, which has always been typical of the political culture of the United States, has attracted a number of NGOs over the past decades.

Their goal is to turn the World Social Forum into a compliment to the Davos forum. In other words, instead of questioning the principles of liberalism, capitalism, and imperialist globalisation, they are giving these principles new legitimacy through a minimum of "social demands" (like the "struggle against poverty"). Associations (as apolitical as possible) of the so called "civil society" are considered instrumental in the formulation of such demands.

There are already a number of such adverse initiatives, supported by the Davos establishment, the G7, the big foundations in the United States, and the institutions of the European Union. The "Mediterranean Forum" (the so called Barcelona initiative promoted by the European Union), and the "Arab Democracy Forum" (later called the "Future forum") promoted by US

agencies, the coalitions of hand picked NGOs formed on the initiative of international institutions (principally the UN and the World Bank) in order to "follow" the big conferences organised by the institutions of the system (WTO and others), are probably meant to divide the Social Forums, or maybe to make them break down, or at least stop their potential development, growth and radicalisation.

(Translated from the French by Mikael Böök, e mail: book@kaapeli.fi)