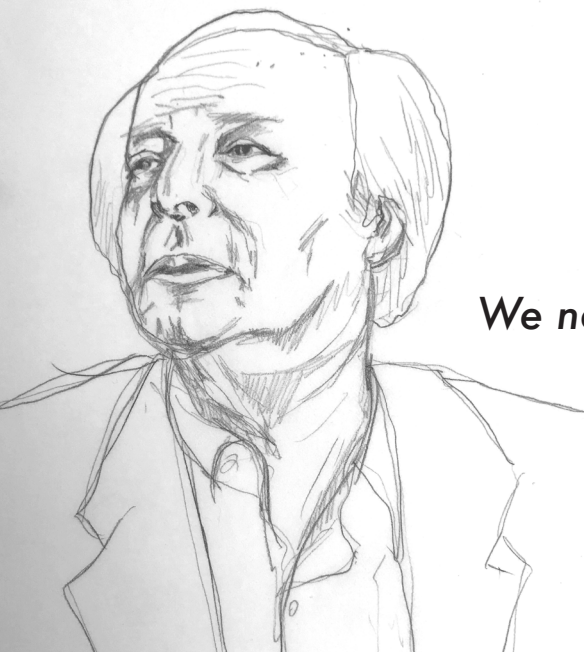




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Globalisation and Its Alternative: An Interview with Samir Amin

Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research



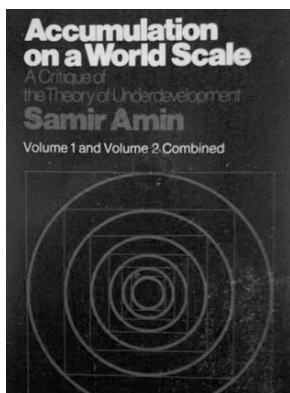
We need Marx today.

Samir Amin (1931-2018) was born in Cairo (Egypt) and died in Paris (France). These two cities did not define his life; Samir Amin adopted another city as his base – Dakar (Senegal). It was in Dakar that Samir Amin ran the Forum Tiers Monde (Third World Forum). Here, he looked out of his window and observed the dangers of our current world, but also its possibilities. It was as an African that Samir Amin understood the world.

Samir Amin was doing his PhD in Paris when Gamal Abdul Nasser and his Free Officers overthrew the British-dominated monarchy in Egypt in 1952 and directed their country towards a path of non-alignment. The victories of anti-colonial nationalism inspired Amin, even as he worried about the roadblocks placed before them. In his thesis, Amin thought hard about the problems of his native land and other countries despoiled by the colonial menace. For Amin, the Third World suffered from theft, plunder as well as deindustrialisation, and then unequal exchange. The policy space for the new Third World states — Nasser's Egypt amidst them — was narrow. Emancipation would be difficult. It would take courage to break the yoke of monopoly capitalism, to rise from the penalty of colonialism and advance towards a necessary socialist future.



Amin, like others in his generation such as India's Ashok Mitra and Brazil's Celso Furtado, did not go immediately into the academy. He went home to Cairo, where he worked in Nasser's Institute for Economic Management (1957-1960) and then to Bamako (Mali), where he worked as an adviser in the Ministry of Planning (1960-1963). Amin would talk fondly of these years, of the experience he had in trying to move an agenda for the development of his country and that of other African countries. The limitations set by the powerful countries of the world — the imperialist bloc led by the United States — and by the system of monopoly capitalism prevented any major breakthrough for states such as Egypt and Mali. Amin's first book, published in the 1960s, was on the experience of development undertaken by Mali, Guinea and Ghana. It warned against any facile belief in progress. The unequal system in the world generated profits for the powerful and generated poverty for the weak.

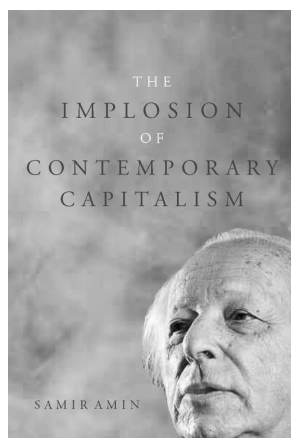
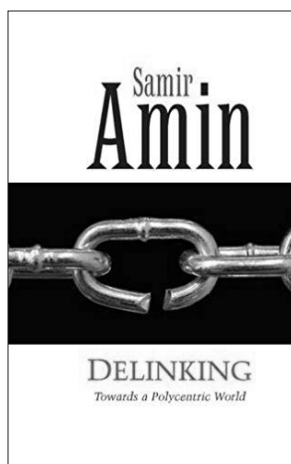


In his most important book, *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1970), Amin showed how resources flowed from the countries of the periphery to enrich the countries of the core through a process that he called 'imperialist rent'. When the system changed in the 1970s, Amin tracked these changes empirically and theoretically. It was in this period that he wrote *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World* (1985), in which he called for the disengagement of countries of the periphery from the development agendas and pressures

from the countries of the core.

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the United States to unparalleled power, Amin wrote of the ‘empire of chaos’, of a new era that would result in great inequality, precarious labour, the destruction of agriculture and the dangers of political religion. What Amin tracked in 1992 would become clear two decades later, when he revisited these same themes in *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism* (2013). Monopoly firms had sucked the life out of the system, turning businesspeople into ‘waged servants’ and journalists into the ‘media clergy’. An unsustainable world system, with finance in dominance and people whipping from one precarious job to another, seemed to threaten the future of humanity. He surveyed the world and found no actually existing alternative to the monopoly-dominated system that — like a vampire — sucked the blood out of the world. This did not mean that history was to drive humanity over the precipice. Other choices lay before us.

In one of his last texts, Amin reflected on a line from the *Communist Manifesto* — that the class struggle always results ‘either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes’. This sentence, he wrote, ‘has been at the forefront of my thinking for a long time’. He was not interested in defeat: ‘The uninterrupted revolution’, he wrote, ‘is still on the agenda for the periphery. Restorations



The class struggle always results ‘either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes’.

in the course of the socialist transition are not irrevocable. And breaks in the imperialist front are not inconceivable in the weak links of the centre’. However bad the situation — harshness and ugliness everywhere — our struggles were unbeaten and our futures uncharted. As long as we are resisting, he would say quoting the Lebanese Marxist Mahdi Amel (1936-1987), we are free.



Just before he died, Amin gave a long interview to our **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** fellows Jipson John and Jitheesh P. M. The interview has been edited to form our first *Notebook*. This *Notebook* lays out Amin’s assessment of the concept of ‘globalisation’ as well as his concept of ‘de-linking’. It is intended for this *Notebook* to be the basis of discussions amongst militants about our current condition and the way forward.

When asked about the relevance of Marxism today, Amin answered, ‘I think Marxism is more important and relevant today than ever. No text published in the middle of nineteenth century is as relevant as the *Communist Manifesto* to the present world. It describes many features of capitalism of that time that are ever relevant to present conditions. **We need Marx today.** Of course, we should not just repeat what Marx said in his time, but we should continue his mode of thinking – that is, to give Marxist answers to present challenges’. Amin’s assessment of globalisation and his idea of de-linking constitute – as Lenin said of Marxism – ‘the very gist, the living soul of Marxism, a concrete analysis of a concrete situation’. This interview is the summary of a lifetime of reflection on the type of questions that animate **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**. This is why we are pleased – in homage to our friend Samir Amin – to publish his interview with our team as our first *Notebook*.

GLOBALISATION

How do you understand the social process of globalisation?

AMIN: Globalisation is nothing new. It is an old and important dimension of capitalism. You Indians would know better than anyone else. You have been conquered and colonised by the British starting in the eighteenth century and ending in the twentieth century. That was also globalisation. Not the globalisation you wanted. But you were integrated into the global capitalist system. Colonisation was one form of globalisation. But the people of India struggled against it and re-conquered their independence under a leadership that was not a socialist revolutionary leadership but was the national- populist leadership of M. K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Your independence in 1947 came at two costs. First, an important part of India, which now happens to be Pakistan and Bangladesh, was separated from India. That was a criminal act of the colonialists. Second, the independence that was won was then re-conquered by the Indian bourgeoisie, led by the Congress Party with a wide popular alliance that included parts of the working-class.



It is usually fashionable today to say that globalisation after World War II was bipolar – the United States on one side and the USSR on the other, locked in a Cold War. That is basically wrong. The globalisation we had after World War II, to say from 1945 to 1980 or 1990, is what I have called **Negotiated Globalisation**. By ‘negotiated globalisation’ I mean that the governments and peoples of Asia and Africa, the USSR and the United States and its allies created a multi-polar negotiated structure that governed

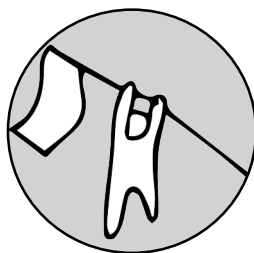
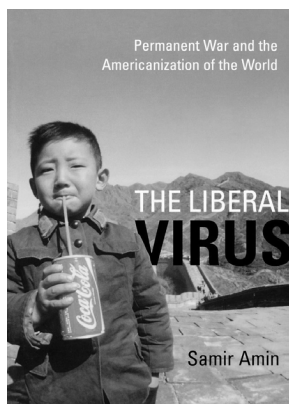
the world order. This structure was imposed on imperialism and forced it to adjust to the power bloc that emerged out of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Bandung conference of 1955. Industrial progress, initiated during the Bandung era, did not follow an imperialist logic, but was imposed by the victories of the peoples of the South. It was in this era that countries like India and Indonesia, Ghana and Tanzania won their independence. This Negotiated Globalisation was produced by four different historical blocs, each of them pushing against the other:

- (1) The imperialist alliance of the United States and Western Europe with its allies in Japan, Australia and Canada.
- (2) The Soviet Union with its allies from Eastern Europe.
- (3) The People's Republic of China, which in spite of belonging to the so-called socialist camp had developed an independent policy since at least 1950.
- (4) The countries that created the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961, but that met in Bandung in 1955. At Bandung, the representatives of the people of Asia, China, India, Indonesia and a number of other countries met for the first time in Indonesia. It was just a few years after India re-conquered its independence, a few years after the Chinese Communist party had entered into Beijing; it was also a few years after Indonesia re-conquered its independence from Dutch. This was a camp not only of Asian countries, but one that included most of the newly independent countries of Africa at that time. The Portuguese colonies joined later, and South Africa joined later still. Cuba was the only country from Latin American that joined this group. The national-populist regimes of this fourth group came together institutionally in the NAM, which would meet every year and harmonise a political line as well as in the Group of 77, which would be the bloc of the South inside the United Nations.

We had a pattern of globalisation that was a multi-polar globalisation, one that was negotiated between the four groups. From the point of view of the peoples of Africa and Asia, this was a time when imperialism was compelled to make concessions and to accept the national-popular programmes of India and other African and Asian countries. Instead of the countries of the south adjusting to the needs and demands of globalisation, it was the imperialist countries which were compelled to adjust to our demands. Each of these parts of multi-polar globalisation developed their own forms of development.

- (1) The West, as a result of the victories of the working-class, developed a pattern of so-called welfare states.
- (2) The Socialist bloc – the USSR, Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam and Cuba – developed different patterns of socialism.
- (3) The third pillar of India – led by the Congress Party – Nasserite Egypt and also of the other so-called socialist type states in Africa and the Middle East developed forms of socialism.

The three pillars reached their historical limits by the 1980s and 1990s, when they broke down. Some break-downs were brutal, such as the Soviet Union in 1991. Not only was the country divided and split into fifteen republics, but the majority of them moved to



the European orbit – some entering the European Union and the military alliance of the West, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The defeat of Communism in the East did not result in the victory of Social Democracy in the West. Even Social Democracy was defeated. The social democrats became social liberals – or, in other words, they adopted the political terrain that accepted the inevitability of capitalism and they accepted the idea that a ‘low-intensity democracy’, a democracy of heavily funded elections, overshadows class politics (as I lay out in *The Liberal Virus*, 2004). Now, there is no difference between the social-democratic or socialist ruling parties in Western Europe and the normal, traditional right-wing parties. They are all social liberals. It means that both the old conservatives and the old social democrats are now in alliance with **Global Monopoly Capital** [see below].

The third pillar, our pillar, also broke down in different ways. In some cases, there were coup d'états. In other cases – such as in India – the dominant class moved right-ward and it accepted the conditions and patterns of so-called liberal globalisation. This was from the time of Indira Gandhi onwards. The process was similar in Egypt. After the death of Nasser in 1970, his successor Anwar Sadat said that we have nothing to do with this ‘bullshit’ called socialism and that we should go back to capitalism and have an alliance with the United States of America and others.

The Chinese went their way differently after the death of Mao in 1976 and moved to a new pattern of globalisation, but with some specificity to their own needs. It is not only the political specificity of the Communist Party of China maintaining its rule over China, but also its socio-economic specificity which differentiates China from India. The enormous difference between China and India is that China had undergone a radical revolution, which India has not yet.

So, we have a variety of patterns. It is the breakdown of these three systems – so-called Social Democracy in the West, the Soviet system and the Bandung system – which provides all the conditions for imperialist capitalism to move on the offensive and to enforce its new pattern of globalisation.

What are the characteristics of this new pattern of globalisation?

AMIN: The increased offensive of imperialist capitalism is not only related to the defeat of the socialists or the communists or indeed the national-populists. It is also related to the changes in the imperialist-capitalist countries of Europe, the United States and Japan.

The key term here is **Global Monopoly Capitalism**. Monopoly capitalism, as a social force, is nothing new. It moved in two stages.

- (1) The first stage of monopoly capital was from the end of the nineteenth century to World War II – a long period of more than half a century. This monopoly capital was analysed by social democrats such as John A. Hobson and Rudolf Hilferding. During this period, monopoly capital was national in character. There was British imperialism, US imperialism, German imperialism, Japanese imperialism, and French imperialism. As Lenin wrote in his studies of imperialism in 1916, these imperialist forces were not only conquering and subjugating the periphery, but they were also fighting among themselves. The struggle amongst themselves led to two World Wars. All the socialist revolutions of that period took place in the periphery of the global imperialist system: beginning in the semi-periphery with the weakest link – Russia – and then in the real peripheries of Vietnam and Cuba. No revolution took place in the West. There was no socialist revolution on the agenda in the United States, in Western Europe or in Japan.
- (2) After World War II gradually and then suddenly in the middle of the 1970s, monopoly capital in the West moved to a new stage which I call the stage of generalised monopoly capital. Monopoly capital was successful enough to submit all the other forms of social production to a position of being its sub-contractor. This meant that the value produced through human activities was

to a large extent absorbed by monopoly capital in the form of imperialist rent. In this new globalisation, our countries are invited to be sub-contractors for imperialism. That is obvious in the case of India. Take the case of Bengaluru city. It has developed as the most promising region of sub-contracting for Monopoly Capital not only of Britain and the United States but also the Monopoly Capital of Europe and Japan.

One important element is to clarify that the machinery of the state does not dissolve in this era of globalisation. The reality is that the monopoly capital, even in the imperialist countries, needs the machinery of the state. The state has been domesticated to serve the exclusive interests of the imperialists. You can see it in the way Donald Trump uses the government in the United States and you can see it in the so-called national consensus state of Britain, France and Germany. So, to say that the market forces replace the states is nonsense. The state – with its apparatus of military and police power – is essential to the process of globalisation.

What are the challenges posed by this globalisation for the countries of the South?

AMIN: The challenge for us today is to look and strive for an alternative to globalisation. We have to move out of this pattern of globalisation. Globalisation has to be qualified. In the earlier days it was colonial globalisation for India and other nations. After our victory, the victory of the people of India along with the victory of Chinese and others, we have had **negotiated globalisation**. Now we are back to the so-called **liberal globalisation** which is unilaterally decided by the countries of the G7 (Group of 7), that is the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. The challenge before us is not to accept this pattern of globalisation, not to have illusions about this globalisation. For the African countries, this globalisation means plunder of their national

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resources of oil, gas, minerals and also arable land. For India, just as for many other countries of Latin America and South Asia, it takes other forms. This includes taking advantage of our cheap manpower, transferring the values created in our countries through the extraction of monopoly rent for the imperialist system. This is the challenge before us.

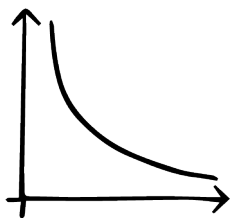
John Bellamy Foster of Monthly Review writes that there are only two options before us: socialism or extermination, as capitalism has reached a dead end. You have written that capitalism has become obsolete. Are you saying that the end of capitalism is on the horizon? What makes capitalism an obsolete social system?

AMIN: Capitalism is in a structural crisis. In the mid-1970s, the rates of growth of the capitalist developed centres – the United States, Europe, and Japan – fell to half of what they had been in the previous thirty years. And they have never recovered since. This means that the crisis continues and is even deepening from year to year. And the announcements that we are moving out of the crisis because the growth rate in Germany or elsewhere, is rising from 1.2% to 1.3%, is just laughable.

This is a systemic crisis. It is not a U-crisis, but it is an L-crisis.



U-crisis: a normal type of capitalist crisis. It refers to the fact that the same rationality that led to the recession in the first place can bring back growth with minor structural changes. The graph for this crisis looks like a U – a drop and then after a period, growth rises again.



L-crisis: An L-crisis means that the system cannot move out of the recession. There is no line that goes upwards from the drop. The only way out is for the system to be changed. Minor structural changes are not sufficient. We have reached the point where capitalism has moved into decline.

Decline is a very dangerous time. Capitalism will not wait quietly for its death. It will behave more and more savagely in order to maintain its position, to maintain the imperialist supremacy of the centres. That is the root of the problem. I don't know what people mean when they say – 'the dangers of war are greater than ever'. The war started in 1991, immediately after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. The first salvo was the Iraq War of 1991. The breakdown of Yugoslavia from 1991 to 2001 brought this war into Europe. Now, in my opinion, the European system itself has begun to implode. This can be seen not only in the negative results of austerity policies. They are negative for people, but also negative for capitalism because they do not bring back growth, that is to say imperialist growth. The austerity policies do not bring back this growth. The political responses to these policies – whether in the Brexit process, or in the austerity regime in Spain or from the ultra-reactionary chauvinistic governments of Eastern Europe – do not respond to the real challenges of the system. We cannot discuss how to prevent war. War and chaos are inscribed into the logic of this decaying system.

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In your essay 'The Return of Fascism in Contemporary Capitalism' (Monthly Review, September 2014), you make the argument that the crisis of contemporary capitalism creates fertile conditions for the return of fascism in the present world. This is evident from the emergence of various right-wing forces in different parts of the world. Are you pointing to a repetition of classical fascism?

AMIN: The system of so-called neo-liberal globalisation is not sustainable. It generates a lot of resistance in the South, as well as in China. This globalisation has created huge problems for the people of the United States, Japan and Europe. Therefore, this globalisation is not sustainable. Since it is not sustainable, the system looks towards fascism as a response for its growing weakness. That is why fascism has reappeared in the West.

The West exports fascism to our countries. Terrorism in the name of Islam is a form of local fascism. And today, you have in India the Hindu majoritarian reaction. That is also a type of fascism. India was a democratic country. Though India is a country where Hinduism is followed by majority of its people, those who did not refer to Hinduism were also equally accepted. The regime in India is now a form of semi or soft fascism. It is not soft for everybody. It can move harder and harder against certain people. We have the same situation in the Islamic world, starting with Pakistan and moving to Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and others. These forms of local fascism have also penetrated many other countries.

Fascism is not synonymous with an authoritarian police regime that rejects the uncertainties of parliamentary electoral democracy. Fascism is a particular political response to the challenges with which the management of capitalist society may be confronted in specific circumstances. Samir Amin, 'The Return of Fascism in Contemporary Capitalism', Monthly Review, 2014.

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You have written a lot about the emergence of political Islam, its ideology and its nature. Though political Islamists often utter rhetoric against Western culture, you have analysed how these forces are in close alliance with the imperialist forces. How would you explain the contemporary political landscape of the Arab world?

AMIN: The US was surprised by the anti-government uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. They did not expect it. The Central Intelligence Agency thought that Tunisia's President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak were strong, like their police forces. The French also believed this with respect to Tunisia. These gigantic, chaotic movements in Tunisia and Egypt lacked a strategy, and that allowed them to be contained in the old structures and decapitated. But then, just immediately after these two explosions, the Western governments understood that similar movements could also happen elsewhere in the Arab countries for the same reasons. They decided to 'pre-empt' the 'revolutions' by organising 'Colour Revolutions' – revolutions that appear as popular but that are actually controlled by imperialist forces. They selected as their instrument the Islamic reactionary movements financed and controlled by their allies, the Gulf countries. The Western strategy was successful in Libya; but failed in Syria.

In Libya, there was no 'popular' mass protest against the regime. Those who started the movement were small Islamic armed groups who immediately attacked the army and the police, and the next day, called NATO, the French and the British to rescue them! And indeed, NATO responded and moved in. Finally, the Western powers had reached their goal, which was to destroy Libya. Today Libya is much worse off than it was then. But that was the target. It was not a surprise. The target was to destroy the country.

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The same is true with Syria. In Syria, there was a growing civilian democratic popular movement against the regime, because the regime had moved towards accepting neo-liberalism in order to remain in power. But the West – the United States in particular – did not wait. The next day, they had the Islamic movements move in and, with the same scenario, attacked the army and the police and called the West in to help. But the regime was able to defend itself. The dissolution of the army expected by the United States did not happen. The so-called Syrian Free Army is a bluff. These were only a small number of people who were immediately absorbed by the Islamists. And now the Western powers, including the United States, have to recognise that they have lost the war, which does not mean that the Syrian people have won it. But it means that the target to destroy the country, through civil war and intervention, failed. The imperialist powers have not been able to destroy the unity or the potential unity of the country. That is what they wanted to do, with of course the approval of Israel – to repeat what happened in Yugoslavia. And they failed.

In Egypt, the United States – backed by the Europeans who simply follow the United States – chose the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as the alternative. Initially, on January 25, 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood lined up with Mubarak against the movement. Only one week later, they changed sides and joined the revolution. That was an order from Washington. On the other side the radical left was surprised by the popular movement and unprepared; the youth were divided into many organisations, resulting in a lot of illusions and the lack of analytical and strategic capacity. Finally, the movement resulted in what the United States wanted: elections. In those elections, Hamdeen Sabahi, supported by the left, got as many votes as the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohammed Morsi. That is around 5 million votes. It was the United States' embassy, not the Egyptian electoral commission, who declared Morsi the winner!

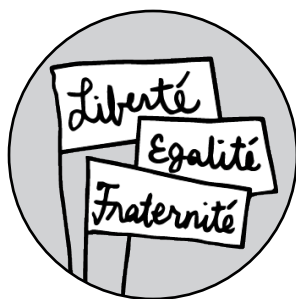
The mistake of the Muslim Brotherhood was to think that they had achieved a final and total victory and that they could exercise their power alone. So, they entered into conflict with everybody, including the army. If they had been smarter and had found an agreement with the army, they would still be in office and sharing power with the army. They wanted all the power for themselves and used it in such an ugly and stupid way, that just a few weeks after their victory, they turned everybody against them.

This led to the events of June 30, 2013. Thirty million people demonstrated in the streets across the country against the Muslim Brotherhood! At that point in time, the US Embassy asked the leadership of the army to support the Muslim Brotherhood despite the call of the people. The army did not follow those instructions and decided instead to arrest Morsi and disband the so-called parliament – a non-elected body made up exclusively of people chosen by the MB. But the new regime, the regime of the army, simply continues the same neo-liberal policy as had been pursued by Mubarak and Morsi.

China has achieved significant economic growth recently. Though it is still a communist state, its economic achievement is generally attributed to the success of its market-friendly approach since 1978. What is your take on the Chinese model of economic development?

AMIN: We have to start from the Chinese Revolution. We had in China what I call a great revolution. There have been three great revolutions in modern history: the French Revolution (1789), the Russian Revolution (1917) and the Chinese Revolution (1949). There have also been revolutions in Cuba and in Vietnam. But let's take the three major ones. A great revolution looks far ahead of the agenda of what is immediately possible.

(1) French Revolution. The slogan of the French Revolution of 1789 was *liberty, equality and fraternity*. The so-called American Revolution of 1776 did not project this target. The word ‘democracy’ does not appear in the Constitution of the United States (1789). Democracy was considered by its framers to be a danger. The system was invented to avoid this danger. The system did not change the relations of production. Slavery remained a decisive part of the system. George Washington was an owner of slaves! Instead, the French Revolution tried to connect conflicting values of liberty and equality. In the United States, it was liberty and competition, that is, liberty under the condition of inequality. The role of the Haitian Revolution is very important as part of this late 18th century process.



(2) The Russian Revolution of 1917 offered as its slogan *Proletarians of all countries unite*. As Lenin said, ‘the revolution started in the weak link but should expand quickly’ – that is, in a short historic time. He expected the revolution would break out in Germany. History proved that he was wrong. It could have happened, but it didn’t. Internationalism was not on the agenda of real history.



(3) The Chinese Revolution of 1949 invented the slogan *Oppressed peoples unite*, which means internationalism at a global level, including the peasant nations of the South. This widened internationalism. This also was not on the agenda of what could be achieved immediately. Bandung in 1955, which was an



echo of the Chinese Revolution, was very timid. It did not achieve much. It was watered-down by nationalistic forces and to a large extent remained in the framework of a bourgeois national project.

Precisely because the great revolutions were ahead of their time, they have been followed by Thermidors and restorations. Thermidor is not restoration; it means a step back in order to keep alive the long-term target but manage to achieve that target in time with concessions. When was the Thermidor in the Soviet Union? Maybe it was the year 1924 with the New Economic Policy. The Chinese say it happened when Nikita Khrushchev took power in 1953. There are good arguments for this, but other people think it occurred later when Leonid Brezhnev became the leader in 1964. However, restoration of capitalism did not come until Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin from the 1980s. At that point, the target of socialism was abandoned. Thermidor is a step back, a restoration is an abandonment.

In China, we had a Thermidor from the start – from 1950. When Mao Zedong was asked ‘Is China socialist?’ he said ‘No, China is a People’s Republic’ and building socialism is a long road. He used the Chinese expression that it would take ‘a thousand years’ to build socialism. So, Thermidor was there from the start. There were two attempts to go beyond that Thermidor. The first one was the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1962. Then we had a second Thermidor with Deng Xiaoping from 1978 to 1989. We still don’t have a restoration even now. This is not merely because the Communist Party has a monopoly over political power. This is because some basic aspects of what have been achieved by the Chinese revolutionary process have been maintained. And this is very fundamental. I refer here specifically to the state ownership of land and its use by families in the frame of the revival of peasant agriculture associated with the construction of a modern industrial system. China follows the ‘two legs’ strategy of globalisation:

Leg 1 – rejection of geopolitical imperialism.

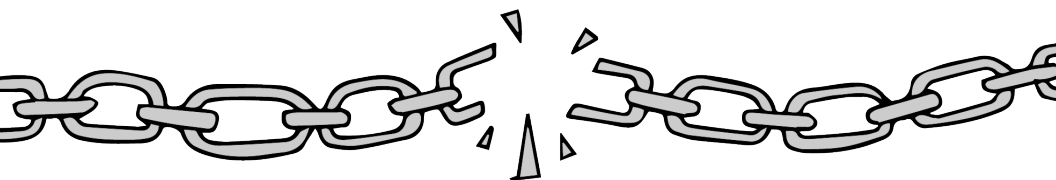
Leg 2 – acceptance of economic neoliberalism.

The Chinese project does not reject the idea of its participation in globalisation, which is a social process dominated by the capitalist and imperialist powers. This is leg no. 2. But, the Chinese project even here does not adopt the full parameters of globalisation. China has entered into the globalisation of trade, and the globalisation of investments, but with state control, at least to a certain effective extent. In addition, China is not operating within globalisation, like those countries which accept the conditionality imposed through free trade, free investment, and financial globalisation. China has not moved into financial globalisation. It has maintained its independent financial system, which is operated by the state, not only formally but in substance. There is a kind of state capitalism in operation here. Globalisation does come into conflict with the 'two legs' Chinese strategy. Imperialist globalisation and the Chinese project are not complementary strategies. They are in conflict.

My qualification is that China is not socialist, but it is also not capitalist. It contains conflicting tendencies. Is it moving toward socialism or capitalism? Most of the reforms that have been introduced, particularly after Deng Xiaoping, have been rightist, making room, and expanding room, for the capitalist mode of production and for the emergence of a bourgeois class. But, so far, the other dynamic – that identified by the 'two legs strategy' – has been maintained, and this conflicts with the logic of capitalism. That is how I situate China today.

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DE-LINKING



One of the most important and alarming phenomena of neo-liberal globalization has been the increasing growth of inequality. Economists like Thomas Piketty and others have empirically documented its magnitude. Piketty says that a universal wealth tax or progressive taxation is the mechanism to check this inequality. Do you think that this solution is possible under capitalism?

AMIN: These data are correct, or at least the best ones that could be found. Inequality has grown very fast over the past fifty years. Yet, the analyses provided by those who have given us this data remain weak to say the least. The fact that inequality is growing everywhere needs to be explained. Is there a unique reason for that? Is the pattern of growing inequality similar for all countries? And if not, if there are different patterns of inequality, why is that so?

These reports of inequality do not make a crucial distinction between (a) the cases of growing inequality that are accompanied by a growth in income for the whole population and (b) the cases of growing inequality that are accompanied by the pauperisation of the majority of the population. To compare China and India is very significant. In China, the growth of income has been a reality for almost all the population, even if that growth has been much higher for some than it has been for the majority of the population. Therefore, in China, growing inequality has been accompanied by a reduction in poverty. This is not the case in India and Brazil and in almost all the countries of the South. In these countries, growth – and in some cases significantly high growth – has benefited only a minority of the population (from one per cent in some cases such as Equatorial

Five centuries of the history of continuous and deepening unequal development of capitalism should at least lead them to question this hypothesis. Or at least lead us to do so.

Guinea to twenty per cent in other cases such as India). This growth has not benefited the majority of the population, which has indeed been pauperised. Some indicators suffer from being insufficient by themselves to show the differences between these two scenarios. The Gini coefficient is one indicator that is not comprehensive. China and India might have the same Gini coefficient, and yet the social meaning of the same apparent phenomenon – growing inequality – is very different.

The policy recommendations of those who write about inequality are limited and shy, perhaps even naïve. Progressive taxation is certainly to be welcomed in all cases. But progressive taxation has limited effects as long as it is not supported by broader changes in economic policy. Progressive taxation along with the continuation of a so-called liberal policy that allows monopoly capital to operate freely will only give marginal results. Moreover, the demand for progressive taxation will be considered to be ‘impossible’ by the dominant classes and therefore rejected by the ruling class, who is at the service of monopoly capital. The same could be said about the establishment of a minimum wage. This is welcome, of course, but it will turn out to be of little effect as long as a liberal economic policy is pursued. Wages, once raised, will suffer from inflation, therefore reducing their benefit. That is the argument made by liberals who reject the mere idea of establishing minimum wages through legislation.

More equal access to education and health must be the target of any legitimate challenge to the system. But such a choice implies growing public expenditures, and liberalism considers such growth as unacceptable! Moving toward offering ‘better jobs’ is therefore simply an empty phrase if it is not supported by systematic policies of industrialisation and for the modernisation of family agriculture. China is partly attempting to do this, but not India.

Liberals insist on the need to reduce the public debt. Yet, the reasons for the growth of public debt needs to be explained. Which policies produce this high public debt? This growth is simply the unavoidable result of liberal policies. Public debt is even desirable to monopoly capital, because it offers excess capital opportunities for financial investment.

Piketty and others who have been writing about social inequality are all liberal economists. This means that they do not raise two issues, which I think are decisive:

- (1) They believe in the virtue of an open free market that is regulated as little as possible by the government.
- (2) They believe that there is no alternative to a pattern of open globalisation that allows for the free movement of capital from one country to another. This, for them, is the precondition for global development. They believe that eventually poor countries will catch up with the more developed countries as a result of this kind of globalisation. These scholars are at best ‘reformists’ like Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist of the World Bank.

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What suggestions do you have to offer to check this alarming growth of inequality?

AMIN: Liberalism condemns any attempt to formulate realistic policies for authentic development. By authentic development, I mean development that benefits all people. Any alternative policies within a liberal framework remain shallow, to say the least. Any society that aims to ‘emerge’ cannot avoid some basic issues:

- (1) How to enter into a long process of building a modern, integrated industrial system that is centred on internal popular demand.
- (2) How to modernise family agriculture and ensure food sovereignty.
- (3) How to plan the association of industry and agriculture through a consistently non-liberal policy.

These three points imply the move gradually along the road to socialism.

Such policies imply two directions:

- (1) Regulating the market.
- (2) Controlling globalisation, that is, struggling towards another pattern of globalisation that reduces as much as possible the negative effect of global hegemony.

Only such policies can create the conditions for eradicating poverty and eventually reducing inequalities. China is partly on this road; other countries of the South are not. In the absence of such a radical critique of liberalism, talk of poverty and inequality remain rhetoric and naïve wishful thinking.

How to get out of the crisis of neo-liberal globalisation is an important question. You suggest a de-linking from globalisation as the basic edifice and agenda for any alternative economic policy. How could we de-link from the vortex of globalisation? If we dare to de-link, capital would exit our economy. How could we face this threat? What would be your practical suggestions to a country that dares to de-link from neo-liberalism?

AMIN: De-link is a slogan. I use it as a slogan. The actual problems for

Delinking means not autarky but refusal to bow to the dominant logic of the world capitalist system.
 Samir Amin, *Beyond US Hegemony*, 2006

de-linking are always relative. You cannot de-link totally. But gigantic countries like China, India and some others can de-link to a large extent, can de-link fifty per cent of their economy or even seventy per cent of it. The USSR and China under Mao had de-linked eighty to ninety per cent of their economic activities. But not totally. They still had to trade with western countries and with others. De-link does not mean that you forget about rest of the world and you move to the Moon. Nobody can do that. It would not be rational to do it. **De-linking** only means compelling imperialism to accept your conditions or part of those conditions. When the World Bank speaks of structural adjustment, it always has a unilateral vision of structural adjustment. It determines the policy. To de-link means to drive one's own policy.



In the case of India, for instance, it always adjusts to the demands of the United States. But India could choose the path of not adjusting to imperialism. This is what Nehru tried in his period. This is not what the present Modi government of India is trying to do. So, you have to go back to de-linking. And you can. You have the space for it. Of course, it is often true that some small countries in Africa or in Central America or some areas of Asia would have more difficulty to de-link with others. But if we recreate the atmosphere of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), if we recreate the political solidarity between the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, then we are not a minority. We represent

eighty-five per cent of human kind. And we shall represent more than eighty-five per cent in a few decades. So, we are not so weak. We can de-link and we can successfully de-link to various degrees in accordance not only with our size but also in accordance with our alternative political block, which would replace the core imperialist blocks which are controlling our countries today.

There is a perception held by many people that first colonialism and then globalisation and the integration of the peripheral 'third world' economies with the world market, helped to bring modernity to these societies. Former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh thanked Britain for introducing the railway to India. What is the alternative path to modernity you foresee? Could societies become modern without going through the stage of capitalist development? Does de-linking imply a return to the past?

AMIN When Manmohan Singh thanked the British for introducing the railway, he spoke of a very small part of reality. The British had the railroad built by Indian workers, but they simultaneously destroyed Indian industry, which was more advanced than the British one. At the same time as the British wrecked Indian industry, they transferred economic power to those who had political power. The Zamindars were not owners of the land before the British. They merely collected tributes and duties for various princely states from the peasant community. With the rule of the British, this class became the new landowners. This is how the class of big land owners was formed in Bengal in the east, Punjab in the north-west and in western and northern India. The British engineered a land grab. Manmohan Singh should have remembered that the British introduced not only railways, but centrally brutality, destruction and oppression in different forms.

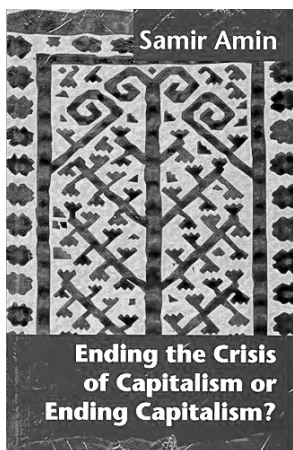
What kind of modernity are we talking about – capitalist modernity or socialist modernity? We cannot speak of modernity in general. We cannot

This requires that the Left be audacious. [...] This is life and struggle. We cannot stop.

say global integration brings modernity. It brings perhaps the mobile telephone to India, but it also brings the pauperisation of eighty per cent of Indians. That is not a small thing. So, we have to qualify what kind of modernity we are talking about.

What do we want? Of course we want modernity. We should understand that de-linking is not a passage to go back to an old India, to a pre-colonial or a colonial India. De-linking is to bring new patterns of modernity to India as well as elsewhere.

What are the prospects and challenges for the left in this contemporary political scenario?



AMIN: In my book, *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism in Crisis* (2010), I saw that we cannot move out of this pattern of crisis without starting to move out of the system itself. It's a gigantic challenge. The solution will not be found in a few years anywhere, neither in the North nor in the South. It will take decades. But the future starts today. We cannot wait until the system has led us into a gigantic war and into ecological catastrophe to react. We have to react now.

This requires that the Left be audacious. By the Left, I mean the radical left, which is much broader than, but includes the actual heirs of the Third International, namely the

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communist parties. At present, there are resistance movements everywhere in the world. In some cases, these are very strong resistance movements. Working people are fighting perfectly legitimate struggles, but they are on the defensive. That is, they are trying to defend whatever they have gained in the past, which has gradually been eroded by so-called neo-liberalism. That is legitimate, but it is not enough.

It is a defensive strategy which allows the power system of monopoly capital to maintain the initiative. We have to move from defensiveness to a positive strategy that is, to an offensive strategy, and reverse the relations of power. Compel the enemy – the power systems – to respond to you instead of you responding to them. And take their initiative away from them. I am not arrogant. I have no blueprint in my pocket for what a communist in Austria should do, for what communists in China or those in Egypt – my country – should do.

But we have to discuss it frankly and openly. We have to suggest strategies, discuss them, test them, and correct them. This is life and struggle. We cannot stop. I want to say that what we all need in the first place is audacity!

Now, it can start to change if the popular movements move from resistance to pushing an aggressive alternative. That could happen in some countries. It has started happening but only in some countries of Europe, namely Greece, Spain and Portugal. In Greece, we have seen that the European system defeated that first attempt. The European people, even those who

are very sympathetic to the Greek movement, have been unable to mobilise an opinion strong enough to change the attitude of Europe. That is a lesson. Audacious movements have to start, and I think they will start, in different countries. I discussed this with, for instance, people from *La France Insoumise* (Unbended France), a movement led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. I did not propose blue-prints, but I generally pointed to strategies starting with the renationalisation of big monopolies and specifically financial and banking institutions. I said that renationalisation is only the first step. It is the precondition for eventually being able to move to the socialisation of the management of the economic system. If it stops at the level of just nationalisation, well then you have state capitalism, which is not very different from private capitalism. That would deceive the people. But if conceived as a first step, it opens the road.

Capitalism has reached a level of concentration of economic and political power that cannot be compared to what it was fifty years ago. A handful, a few tens of thousands of enormously large companies, and a smaller handful – less than twenty major banking institutions – decide the direction of everything. François Morin, a top financial expert, has said that less than twenty financial groups control ninety per cent of the operations of the global integrated monetary and financial systems. If you add to this some fifteen other banks, you go from ninety per cent to some ninety-eight per cent. It is a mere handful of banks. That is centralisation, concentration of power. Property remains disseminated, but that's of less importance. The point is how property is *controlled*. This centralisation of control over property has led to the control of political life.

We are now far from the bourgeois democracy of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. We now live in a world of a one-party system. The social democrats and the conservatives are now social liberals. There might be two parties that compete in elections, but they are effectively the same party. That means we live in a one-party system. In the United States, the Democrats and the Republicans have always been one party. This was not the case in Europe, and therefore, in the past, capitalism could be partly reformed. The social democratic welfare reforms after World War II were big reforms. In my view they were progressive reforms, even if they

were associated with the maintenance of an imperialist attitude vis-à-vis the countries of the South. Now this has become impossible. A one-party system has arrived. It has been losing legitimacy. This also opens up a drift to fascism, to neo-fascism, which is on the rise everywhere. This is one of the reasons why we have to dismantle this system before reconstructing it.

The protest against capitalism cannot just be a protest of movements against the consequence of neo-liberal frontal attacks against the interests of the people. It must reach the level of getting people politically conscious. This consciousness must lead to the creation of wide social alliance to replace the comprador alliances which are ruling our countries and the pro-imperialist alliances which are ruling the Western countries.

Can these isolated struggles in different countries of the world pose any challenge to generalised monopoly capital, a force that is truly international in character? What about the need for some kind of international co-operation or for the revival of the spirit of internationalism amongst the struggling masses?

AMIN: We need a revival of internationalism as a fundamental part of the ideology of the future, but we also must organise it – that is, try to interconnect the struggles in different countries. Now, this International cannot be a reproduction of the Third International (the Communist International). Because the Third International came after the victory of the October Revolution and with the assistance of a strong new state, namely the Soviet Union. We are now not in such a position. Therefore, we must imagine another pattern for new international linkages.

Today, we are in a different situation. We have potentially radical, pro-socialist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist forces that are different

We have potentially radical, pro-socialist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist forces that are different in different countries. We have to bring them together. We have to understand that what we share in common is more important than the differences amongst us.

in different countries. We have to bring them together. We have to understand that what we share in common is more important than the differences amongst us. We have to discuss the differences and discuss them freely, without arrogance by proclaiming 'I am right, and you are wrong'. What we have in common is more important and that should be the basis for re-constructing internationalism. I am saying that for the North and the South as well. Each has its specific conditions, and conditions are different from one country to another. The general view is similar, but conditions are different. At any rate, this is my vision on how to start the process.

There are these ambiguities and we cannot avoid them. We shall have broad alliances with people who have never thought that socialism should be the answer to the crisis of capitalism. They will still think that capitalism can be reformed. So what? If we can work together against this capitalism as it is to-day, it would be a first step.

But we have to think ahead about how to create a new international dynamic. I don't have a blueprint for this. It is not about establishing a secretariat or organisational leadership bodies. First, the comrades have to be convinced of the idea, which is not always the case. Second, the Europeans have abandoned anti-imperialist solidarity and internationalism in favour of accepting so-called aid and humanitarian interventions – including bombing people! That is not internationalism.

We have to rebuild a new international dynamic, an international of working people and others. That means a number of peasants and segments of the society that goes far beyond the proletariat.

I think that national policies – we use this word because there is no other word – are still the result of struggles within the borders of countries. Whether these countries are indeed a nation-state or rather a multinational state, they struggle within defined borders. We have to change the balance of forces within countries, which would then enable us to change the balance of forces at the international level.

We have to rebuild a new international dynamic, an international of working people and others. That means a number of peasants and segments of the society that goes far beyond the proletariat. In India, you can see that if you do not have an alliance between the urban proletariat and the urban poor – who have shallow proletariat consciousness – and the vast majority of the Indian rural society or peasants, then you cannot build resistance. These are different social forces and they can be represented by different political voices. But we have to know what we share in common. The interests we share in common are more important than our differences. We need a wide political alliance which can mobilise people belonging to different classes but who are all victims of the imperialism of today.



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