Ending the crisis of capitalism or ending capitalism in crisis?

Capitalism, a Parenthesis in History

The principle of endless accumulation that defines capitalism is synonymous with exponential growth and the latter, like cancer, leads to death. John Stuart Mill, who recognised this, imagined that a 'stationary state of affairs' would put an end to this irrational process. John Maynard Keynes shared this optimism of Reason. But neither was equipped to understand how the necessary overcoming of capitalism could prevail. By contrast, Marx, by giving proper importance to the new class struggle, could imagine the reversal of power of the capitalist class, concentrated nowadays in the hands of the ruling oligarchy.

Accumulation, which is synonymous with pauperisation, provides the objective framework of the struggles against capitalism. But accumulation expresses itself mainly by the growing contrast between the affluence of the societies in the centre [of the world system] who benefit from the imperialist rent and the misery of the societies at the dominated peripheries. This conflict becomes therefore the central axis of the alternative between “socialism and barbarism”.

Historically ‘real existing’ capitalism is associated with successive forms of accumulation by dispossession, not only at the beginning (‘primitive accumulation’) but also at each stage of the unfolding of the capitalist system. Once properly constituted, this ‘Atlantic’ capitalism sought to conquer the world and has remade it on the basis of permanent dispossession of the conquered regions, which in this process became the dominated peripheries of the system.

This ‘victorious’ globalisation has turned out to be unable to impose itself in a durable manner. Just about half a century after its triumph (which appeared to inaugurate the ‘end of history’), this model was questioned by the revolution of the Russian semi-periphery and the (victorious) liberation struggles in Asia and Africa which constitute the history of the twentieth century – the first wave of struggles in favour of the emancipation of the workers and the peoples.

Accumulation by dispossession continues in front of our eyes in the late modern capitalism of the contemporary ‘oligopoles’. In the centres, monopoly rents – whose beneficiaries are the oligopolistic plutocracies – are synonymous with the dispossession of the entire productive basis of society. In the peripheries, this pauperising dispossession manifests itself in the expropriation of the peasantry and the plundering of natural resources of the regions in question. Both these practices constitute the essential pillars of the strategies of expansion of the late capitalism of the ‘oligopoles’.
In this spirit, I situate the ‘new agrarian question’ at the heart of the challenge for the twenty-first century. The dispossession of the peasantry (in Asia, Africa and Latin America) is the major contemporary form the tendency towards pauperisation (in the sense which Marx ascribed to this ‘law’) linked to accumulation. Its implementation cannot be dissociated from the strategies of imperialist rent-seeking and rent-capturing by the ‘oligopoles’, with or without bio-fuels. I deduce from this that the development of the struggles on the ground, the responses that will be given through these struggles to the future of the peasant societies in the South (almost half of mankind) will largely determine the capacity or otherwise of the workers and the peoples to produce progress on the road of constructing an authentic civilisation, liberated from the domination of capital, for which I do not see any name other than that of socialism.

The plundering of the South’s natural resources, which is demanded by the pursuit of the model of wasteful consumption to the exclusive benefit of the North’s affluent societies, destroys any prospect of development worthy of this name for the peoples in question and therefore constitutes the other face of pauperisation on a worldwide scale. In this spirit, the ‘energy crisis’ is neither the product of the rarefaction of certain resources necessary for production (oil, obviously) nor the outcomes of the destructive effects of energy-devouring forms of production and consumption that are currently in place. This description – which is not wrong – fails to go beyond banal and immediate evidence. The ‘energy crisis’ is the product of the will of ‘oligopoles’ and a collective imperialism to secure a monopoly of access to the planet’s natural resources, whether these be scarce or not, in such a way as to appropriate the imperialist rent – even if the utilisation of these resources remained the same as it is now (wasteful and energy-devouring) or if it were subject to ‘environmentally friendly’ measures and new correctives. I deduce from this that the pursuit of the expansionist strategy of the late capitalism of ‘oligopoles’ will inevitably clash with the growing resistance of the nations of the South.

The current crisis is therefore neither a financial crisis nor the sum of multiple systemic crises but the crisis of the imperialist capitalism of ‘oligopoles’ whose exclusive and supreme power risks being questioned once more by the struggles of the entire popular classes and the nations in the dominated peripheries, even if they are apparently ‘emerging markets’. This crisis is also at the same time a crisis of US hegemony. Taken together, the following phenomena are inextricably linked to one another: the capitalism of ‘oligopoles’, the political power of oligarchies, barbarous globalisation, financialisation, US hegemony, the militarisation of the way globalisation is operated in the service of ‘oligopoles’, the decline of democracy, the plundering of the planet’s resources, and the abandoning of development for the South.

The real challenge is therefore as follows: will these struggles manage to converge in order to pave the way – or ways – for the long route towards the transition to world socialism? Or will these struggles remain separate from one another, or will they even clash with each other and therefore become ineffective, leaving the initiative to the capital of the ‘oligopoles’?

From One Long Crisis to Another

The Financial meltdown in September 2008 probably took by surprise the conventional economists who advocated ‘happy globalisation’ and threw some of the fabricators of liberal discourse, triumphant since the ‘fall of the Berlin wall’, in common parlance. If however, this event did not surprise me – I expected it (without of course predicting its date, like Mrs Soleil), it is simply because for me this event is part of the unfolding of the long crisis of an ageing capitalism, begun in the 1970s.
It is good to return to the first long crisis of capitalism which fashioned the twentieth century, as the parallel between the stages of the unfolding of both crises is so striking.

The industrial capitalism, which was triumphant in the nineteenth century, entered a crisis from 1873 onwards. Profit rates dropped, for these reasons highlighted by Marx. Capital reacted by a double movement of concentration and globalised expansion. The new monopolies confiscated in addition to their profits a rent levied on the massive added value generated by the exploitation of labour. They reinforced the colonial conquests of the planet. These structural transformations allowed a new surge in profits. These transformations led to the ‘belle époque’ – from 1890 to 1914 – which is the period of globalised domination of the capital owned by the financialised monopolies. The dominant discourses of that time praised colonisation (‘civilising mission’) and described globalisation as synonymous with peace, earning the support of the workers’ social democracy.

However, the ‘belle époque’, announced as the ‘end of history’ by the ideologues of this period, ended in the First World War, as only Lenin had presaged. And the period which followed and lasted until the aftermath of the Second World War was the period of ‘wars and revolutions’. In 1920, after the Russian Revolution (the ‘weak link’ of the system) had been isolated following the defeat of the hopes of revolution in central Europe, the capital of the financialised monopolies restored against all the odds the system of the ‘belle époque’; a restoration, denounced by Keynes at the time, which was at the origin of the financial collapse of 1929 and the Great Depression which it led to until the beginning of the Second World War.

The ‘long twentieth century’ – 1873-1990 – is therefore both the century of the deployment of the first systemic and profound crisis of ageing capitalism (to the point where Lenin thought that this capitalism of monopolies constitutes the ‘supreme phase of capitalism’) and that of the first triumphant wave of anti-capitalist revolutions (Russia, China) and the anti-imperialist movements of Asia and Africa.

The second systemic crisis of capitalism began in 1971 with the abandoning of the gold convertibility of the Dollar, almost exactly a century after the commencement of the first. Profit rates, investment levels and growth rates all collapsed (and never again reverted to the levels in the period 1945-75). Capital responded to the challenge not unlike in the previous crisis by a double of concentration and globalisation. As such, capital establishes structures that defined the second ‘belle époque’ (1990-2008) of financialised globalisation, allowing oligopolistic groups to levy their monopoly rent. The same discourse accompanied this process: the ‘market’ guarantees prosperity, democracy and peace; it’s the ‘end of history’. The same rallying occurred, this time by the European socialists to the new liberalism. However, this new ‘belle époque’ was from the onset accompanied by war, the war of the North versus the South, started in 1990. Just as the first financialised globalisation had led to 1929, so the second produced 2008. Today we have reached this crucial moment which announces the probability of a new wave of ‘wars and revolutions’. This is even more so since the ruling powers do not envisage anything other than the restoration of the system as it was before the financial meltdown.

The analogy between the unfolding of these long, systemic crises of ageing capitalism is striking. There are nonetheless differences whose political significance is important.
Moving out of the Crisis of Capitalism or of Capitalism in Crisis?

Behind the financial crisis, a systemic crisis of the capitalism of oligopolies

Contemporary capitalism is first and foremost a capitalism of ‘oligopolies’ in the full sense of the term (which so far capitalism was only in part). What I mean by this is that the ‘oligopolies’ alone command the production of the economic system in its entirety. They are ‘financialised’ in the sense that they alone have access to capital markets. This financialisation grants monetary and financial market – their market, on which they compete with each other – the status of dominant market, which in turn fashions and commands the labour and commodity exchange markets.

This globalised financialisation expresses itself by a transformation of the ruling bourgeois class which has become a rent-capturing plutocracy. The oligarchs are not only Russian, as is too often presumed, but rather and much more so US, European and Japanese. The decline of democracy is the inevitable product of this concentration of power to the exclusive benefit of the ‘oligopolies’.

The new form of capitalist globalisation which corresponds to this transformation – by contrast with the one which characterises the first ‘belle époque’ – is also important to specify. I have expressed it in a sentence: the passage from imperialisms (that of the imperialist powers in permanent conflict with each other) to the collective imperialism of the triad (the USA, Europe and Japan).

The monopolies, which emerge in response to the first crisis of profit rates, constituted themselves on the bases that have reinforced the violence of competition between the major imperialist powers of the time, and led to the armed conflict begun in 1914, which continued through the peace of Versailles and then the Second World until 1945. That is what Giovanni Arrighi, André Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein and I described already in the 1970s as the “war of thirty years”, a notion that has been taken up by others since then.

By contrast, the second wave of oligopolistic concentration, begun in the 1970s, constituted itself on totally other bases, within the framework of a system which I have described as the ‘collective imperialism’ of the triad (the USA, Europe and Japan). In this new imperialist globalisation, the domination of the centres is no longer exercised by the monopoly of industrial production (as had been the case hitherto) but by other means (the control of technologies, financial markets, access to the planet’s natural resources, information and communications, weapons of mass destruction). This system which I have also described as “apartheid on a global scale” implies a permanent war against the states and the people of the recalcitrant peripheries, a war begun already in the 1990s by the deployment of military control over the world by the USA and their subordinated NATO allies.

According to my analysis, the financialisation of this system is inextricably linked to its clearly oligopolistic aspect. What pertains between them is a fundamentally organic relation. This point of view is not prevalent, neither in the expansive literature of conventional economists nor in the majority of critical writings on the current crisis.

It is the entire system which henceforth is in difficulty

The facts are clear: the financial collapse is already producing not a ‘recession’ but a veritable, profound depression. But beyond this, other dimensions of the crisis of this system
have surfaced in public consciousness before even the financial meltdown. We know the sort of labels – energy crisis, food crisis, environmental crisis, climate change – and the numerous analyses of these aspects of the contemporary challenges are produced on a daily basis, some of which are of the highest quality…

I remain nonetheless critical about this mode of treating the systemic crisis of capitalism which excessively isolates the different dimensions of the challenge. I would therefore redefine the diverse ‘crises’ as the facets of the same challenge – that of the system of the contemporary capitalist globalisation (whether liberal or not), founded upon the principle that the imperialist rent operates on the global scale, to the benefit of the plutocracy of the ‘oligopoles’ of the imperialist triad.

The real battle is fought on this decisive ground between the ‘oligopoles’ who seek to produce and reproduce the conditions that allow them to appropriate the imperialist rent and all their victims – the workers of the all countries in the North and the South, the peoples of the dominated peripheries condemned to give up any perspective of development worthy of the name.

Moving out of the crisis of capitalism or of capitalism in crisis?

This formula had been suggested by André Gunder Frank and myself in 1974.

The analysis which we developed about the new great crisis that we thought had begun led us to the major conclusion that capital would respond to the challenge by a new wave of concentration on the basis of which it would proceed to massive dislocations. Later developments largely confirmed this. The title of our intervention at a conference organised by Il Manifesto in Rome in 1974 (“Let us not wait for 1984”, referring to the work by George Orwell unearthed from oblivion on this occasion) invited the radical left at that time to renounce any strategy of coming to the aid of capital by looking for ‘exits from the crisis’ in order to seek strategies aimed at an ‘exit from capitalism in crisis’.

I have pursued this line of analysis with a kind of stubbornness which I do not regret. I have suggested a conceptualisation of new forms of domination on the part of the imperialist centres grounded in new modes of control that replaced the old monopoly over exclusively industrial production, which the rise of the countries referred to as ‘emerging markets’ has confirmed. I have described the new globalisation which is being built as an “apartheid at the global level”, calling the militarised management of the planet and in this way perpetuating in new conditions the polarisation which cannot be dissociated from the expansion of the ‘really existing capitalism’.

The Second Wave of Emancipation by the People: a ‘Remake’ of the Twentieth Century or Better?

There is no alternative to a socialist perspective

The contemporary world is governed by oligarchies. The financial oligarchies in the USA, Europe and Japan who dominate not only economic life but also politics and daily life. Russian oligarchies in their image which the Russian State tries to control. Statocracies in China. Autocracies (sometimes hidden behind the appearance of an electoral democracy ‘of low intensity’) inscribed into this worldwide system elsewhere across the globe.
The management of contemporary globalisation by these oligarchies is in crisis.

The oligarchies of the North seek to remain in power once the crisis is over. They do not feel threatened. By contrast, the fragility of the power held by the autocracies of the South is clearly visible. The model of globalisation that is currently in place is therefore vulnerable. Will it be questioned by the revolt in the South, as was the case in the previous century? Probably so, but that would be cause for sadness. For humanity will only commit itself on the road to socialism – the only humane alternative to chaos – once the powers of the oligarchies, their allies and their servants, will have been defeated both in the countries of the North and those in the South.

Long live the internationalism of the people in the face of the cosmopolitanism of the oligarchies.

*Is the reinstatement of the capitalism of financialised and globalised ‘oligopoles’ possible?*

Capitalism is ‘liberal’ by nature, if by ‘liberalism’ we mean not the nice label which this notion inspires but the plain and total exercise of the domination of capital not only over work and the economy but over all aspects of social life. There can be no ‘market economy’ (a vulgar expression for capitalism) without a ‘market society’. Capital pursues stubbornly this unique objective: money; accumulation for its own sake. Marx, and after him other critical thinkers like Keynes, understood this perfectly. But not our conventional economists, including those on the left.

This model of total and exclusive domination by capital had been imposed ruthlessly by the ruling classes throughout the previous long crisis until 1945. Only the triple victory of democracy, socialism and the national liberation of the people allowed from 1945 to 1980 a replacement of this permanent model of the capitalist ideal with the conflictual coexistence of three social regulated models which were the Welfare state of Western social democracy, the ‘really existing’ socialism in the East and the popular nationalisms in the South. The demise and collapse of these three models made the return of the exclusive domination by capital possible, this time described as the neo-liberal phase of capitalism.

I have linked this new ‘liberalism’ to a series of new aspects which appears to me to merit the description of ‘senile capitalism’. My book with the eponymous title, published in 2001, is probably one among the very rare writings at the time which, far from viewing globalised and financialised neo-liberalism as the ‘end of history’, analysed the system of ageing capitalism as unstable, condemned to eventual collapse, precisely in terms of its financialisation (its ‘Achilles Heel’, as I wrote then).

Conventional economists have remained persistently deaf to any questioning of their own dogma, so much so that they were unable to foresee the financial collapse of 2008. Those whom the media have portrayed as ‘critical’ hardly deserve this description. Even Joseph Stiglitz remains convinced that the system as it stands – globalised and financialised liberalism – can be fixed by means of some corrections. Amartya Sen preaches morality without daring to think ‘really existing’ capitalism as it necessarily is.

The social disasters, which the deployment of liberalism – “the permanent utopia of capital”, as I wrote – would cause, have inspired quite a bit of nostalgia in relation to the recent or
distant past. But such and similar kinds of nostalgia cannot respond to the present challenge. For they are the product of an impoverished critical, theoretical thinking which has gradually stopped itself from understanding the internal contradictions and the limits of the post-1945 systems whose erosions, diversions and collapses appeared to be unforeseen cataclysms.

However – in the void created by these regressions of critical, theoretical thinking – a consciousness about the new dimensions of the systemic crisis of civilisation managed to chart a path. I am referring here to the ecological movement. But the Greens who have purported to distinguish themselves radically from both the Blues (the Conservatives and the Liberals) and the Reds (the Socialists) are locked into an impasse, since they have failed to link the ecological dimension to the challenge of a radical critique of capitalism.

Everything was therefore ready to ensure the triumph – in fact, ephemeral but experienced as ‘definitive’ – of the alternative of ‘liberal democracy’. A miserable kind of thinking – a veritable non-thinking – which ignores Marx’s decisive argument about bourgeois democracy’s failure to acknowledge that those who decide are not those who are concerned by these decisions. Those who decide and benefit from the freedom reinforced by the control over property are nowadays the plutocrats of the capitalism of ‘oligopoles’, and States are their debtors. Perforce the workers and the people in question are little more than their victims. But the sort of liberal nonsense might at some point have been credible, at least for a short while, as a result of the diversions of the post-1945 systems. The misery of the prevailing dogmas could no longer understand the origins of the crisis. Liberal democracy might therefore look like “the best of all possible systems”.

Today the powers that be, those who did not foresee anything, are busy restoring the same system. Their possible success, as that of the conservatives in the 1920s – which Keynes had denounced without much of an echo at the time – will only exacerbate the scope of the contradictions which are the root cause of the 2008 financial collapse.

No less serious is the fact that economists on the ‘left’ have long since embraced the essential tenets of vulgar economics and accepted the erroneous idea that markets are rational. The same economists have focused their efforts on defining the conditions for this market rationality, thereby abandoning Marx who had discovered the irrationality of markets from the point of view of the workers and the peoples, a perspective deemed ‘obsolete’. According to this ‘leftwing’ perspective, capitalism is flexible, adjusts itself to the requirements of progress (technological and even social) if it is constrained in this way. These ‘leftist’ economists were not prepared to understand that the crisis which has erupted was inevitable. They are even less prepared to confront the challenges which are faced by the peoples as a result. Like the other vulgar economists, they will seek to repair the damage without understanding that it is necessary to pursue another route if this is to be successful – that of overcoming the fundamental logics of capitalism. Instead of looking for exits from capitalism in crisis, they think they can simply exit the crisis of capitalism.

**US hegemony in crisis**

The recent G20 Summit in London in April 2009 in no way marks the beginning of a ‘reconstruction of the world’. And it is perhaps no coincidence amidst the flurry that it was followed by a summit meeting of NATO, the right hand of contemporary imperialism, and by the reinforcement of NATO’s military involvement in Afghanistan. The permanent war of the North against the South must continue.
We already knew that the governments of the triad – the USA, Europe and Japan – would pursue the only goal of restoring the system as it existed before September 2008, and one must not take seriously the interventions at the G20 Summit in London by President Obama and Gordon Brown, on the one hand, and those of Sarkozy and Merkel, on the other hand. Both were aimed at amusing the spectators. The purported differences, identified by the media but without any genuine substance, respond to the exclusive needs of the leaders in question to make the best of themselves in the face of naïve public opinion. ‘Re-create capitalism’, ‘moralising financial operations’: such and similar grand declarations in order to eschew the real questions. That is why restoring the system, which is not impossible, will not solve any problem but will in fact exacerbate the gravity of the crisis. The ‘Stiglitz Commission’, convened by the United Nations, is part of this strategy of tricking the public. Obviously one could not expect otherwise from the oligarchs who control the real power and their political debtors. The point of view which I have developed and which puts the emphasis on the inextricable links between the domination of the ‘oligopoles’ and the necessary financialisation of managing the world economy is confirmed by the results of the G20.

More interesting is the fact that the invited leaders of the ‘emerging markets’ chose to remain silent. A single intelligent sentence was said throughout this day of great spectacle, by the Chinese President Hu Jintao who observed ‘in passing’, without insisting and with a (mocking?) smile, that it would be necessary to envisage the creation of a global financial system that is not based on the US Dollar. Some commentators immediately linked this – correctly – to Keynes’s proposals in 1945.

This ‘remark’ is a rude awakening that the crisis of the capitalist system of ‘oligopoles’ is inextricably linked to the crisis of US hegemony, which is on the ropes. But who will replace it? Certainly not ‘Europe’ which does not exist apart from or outside Atlanticism and has no ambition to be independent, as the NATO summit meeting once more confirmed. China? This ‘threat’, which the media undoubtedly repeat ad nauseam (a new ‘Yellow peril’) in order to justify the Atlantic alignment, has no foundation in reality. The Chinese leadership knows that the country does not have such means and they do not have the will. China’s strategy is confined to promoting a new globalisation without hegemony – something which neither the USA nor Europe deem acceptable.

The likelihood of a possible evolution in this direction depends once more on the countries of the South. And it is no coincidence that UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) is the only institution within the UN umbrella which has taken initiatives that are fundamentally different from those of the ‘Stiglitz Commission’. It is no coincidence that UNCTAD’s Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi from Thailand, hitherto considered to be a perfect liberal, has dared propose in a report entitled “The Global Economic Crisis” of March 2009 realistic ideas that are part of a second wave of a ‘Southern awakening’.

For its part, China has begun to build – in a gradual and controlled manner – alternative regional financial systems rid of the US Dollar. Such and similar initiatives complete on the economic level the promotion of political alliance within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is a major obstacle to NATO’s belligerence.

The NATO summit meeting, which was convened at the same time in April 2009, agreed Washington’s decision not to start a gradual military disengagement but on the contrary to reinforce the scope of its military involvement, always under the misguided pretext of the ‘war against terror’. President Obama deploys his talent to save Clinton’s and Bush’s programme of imposing global military control, which is the only way of prolonging the days
of US hegemony now under threat. Obama scored points and obtained a total unconditional surrender from Sarkozy’s France – the end of Gaullism – which has now rejoined NATO’s military command, something that was difficult during Bush’s reign when Washington spoke without intelligence but not without arrogance. Moreover, Obama has acted like Bush by ignoring Europe’s independence and giving lessons about how Turkey should be allowed to enter the Union!

**Towards a Second Wave of Victorious Struggles for the Emancipation of Workers and Peoples**

*Are new advances in the struggles for the emancipation of the peoples possible?*

The political management of the worldwide domination by the capital of ‘oligopoles’ is necessarily marked by extreme violence. For in order to maintain their status of affluent societies, the countries of the imperialist triad are henceforth obliged to limit the access to the planet’s natural resources to their own exclusive benefit. This new requirement is at the origin of the militarisation of globalisation which I have elsewhere described as the “empire of chaos” (the title of a book of mine published in 2001), an expression which others have since then taken up.

In line with the ‘Washington project’ of military control over the planet and the waging of ‘pre-emptive wars’ under the pretext of the ‘war against terror’, NATO has portrayed itself as the ‘representative of the international community’ and has thereby marginalised the UN – the only institution entitled to speak in this name.

Of course these real goals cannot be openly acknowledged. In order to mask them, the powers in question have chosen to instrumentalise the discourse on democracy and have arrogated to themselves the ‘right to intervene’ so as to impose ‘the respect for human rights’!

At the same time, the absolute power of the new oligarchic plutocracies has hollowed out the substance of the practice of bourgeois democracy. In former times, political negotiation between the different social parties of the hegemonic bloc was necessary for the reproduction of the power of capital. By contrast, the new political management of the society of the capitalism of ‘oligopoles’, established by means of a systematic de-politicisation, has given rise to a new political culture of ‘consensus’ (modelled on the example of the USA) which substitutes the consumer and the political spectator for the active citizen – a condition for an authentic democracy. This “liberal virus” (the title of another book of mine published in 2005) abolishes the opening onto possible alternative choices and replaces it with a consensus that is centred on the sole respect for a procedural, electoral democracy.

The demise and collapse of the three above-mentioned social models is at the origin of this drama. The page of the first wave of struggles for the emancipation has now been turned, that of the second wave has not yet been opened. In the twilight which separates them one can discern the “monsters”, as Gramsci writes.

In the North, these developments have caused the loss of a real sense of democratic practice. This regression is masked by the pretensions of the so-called ‘post-modern’ discourse, according to which nations and classes have already left the scene and ceded the political space to the ‘individual’ which is now the active subject of social transformation.
In the South, other illusions dominate the political realm. The illusion of a capitalist, national and autonomous development that is part of globalisation, which is powerful among the dominant and the middles classes in ‘emergent markets’, fuelled by the immediate success of the last few decades. Or the nostalgic (para-ethnic or para-religious) illusions about the past in the countries excluded from this process.

What is worse, these developments have strengthened the general embrace of the ‘ideology of consumption’ and the idea that progress is measured by the quantitative growth of consumption. Marx had already shown that it is the mode of production which determines the mode of consumption and not vice-versa, as is claimed by vulgar economics. What is lost sight of in all this is the perspective of a humanist and superior rationality, the basis for the socialist project. The gigantic potential which the application of science and technology offers to the whole of humanity and which would enable the real flourishing of individuals and societies in the North and the South is wasted by the requirements of its subordination to the logics of the unlimited pursuit of the accumulation of capital. What’s even worse, the continuous progress of the social productivity of labour is linked to the breathtaking use of mechanisms of pauperisation (visible at a global scale, among other the wholesale attack on peasant societies), as Marx had already understood.

Embracing the ideological alienation which is caused by capitalism does not only adversely affect the affluent societies of the imperialist centres. The peoples of the peripheries, who are for their most deprived of access to acceptable levels of consumption and blinded by aspirations to consume like the opulent North, are losing consciousness about the fact that the logic of historical capitalism makes the extension of this model to the entire globe impossible.

We can therefore understand the reasons why the 2008 financial collapse was the exclusive result of a sharpening of the internal contradictions peculiar to the accumulation of capital. Only the intervention of forces that embody a positive alternative can offer a way of imagining an exit from the chaos caused by the sharpening of the internal contradictions of the system. (In this spirit, I have contrasted the ‘revolutionary way’ with the model of overcoming the historically obsolete system through ‘decadence’). And in the current state of affairs, the movements of social protest, despite their visible growth, remain as a whole unable to question the social order linked to the capitalism of ‘oligopoles’ in the absence of a coherent political project that can match the challenges.

From this point of view, the current situation is markedly different from that which prevailed in the 1930s, when the forces of socialism clashed with fascist parties, producing Nazism, the New Deal and the Popular Fronts.

The deepening of the crisis will not be avoided, even if reinstating the system of the domination by the capital of the ‘oligopoles’ were potentially successful, which is not impossible. In this situation, the possible radicalisation of the struggles is not an improbably hypothesis, even if the obstacles remain formidable.

In the countries of the triad, such a radicalisation would imply that the agenda would be to expropriate the ‘oligopoles’, which seems to be excluded for the foreseeable future. In consequence, the hypothesis that – despite the turmoil caused by the crisis – the stability of the societies of the triad will not be questioned cannot be discarded. There is a serious risk of a ‘remake’ of the wave of struggles of emancipation as happened in the twentieth century, that is to say, a questioning of the system exclusively by some of its peripheries.
A second stage of “the South’s awakening” (the title of yet another book of mine published in 2007 which offers a reading of the period of Bandung as the first stage of this awakening) is now on the agenda. In the best possible scenario, the advances produced in these conditions could force imperialism to retreat, to renounce its demented and criminal project of controlling the world militarily. And if this were the case, then the democratic movement of the countries at the centre of the system could make a positive contribution to the success of this strategy of neutralisation. Moreover, the decline of the imperialist rent which benefits the societies in question, itself caused by the re-organisation of the international equilibria to the advantage of the South (especially China) could help the awakening of a socialist consciousness. But on the other hand, the societies of the South could still confront the same challenges as in the past, a situation that would produce the same limits on their progress.

A new internationalism of the workers and the peoples is necessary and possible

Historical capitalism is all things to everyone, except that it is durable. It is but a short parenthesis in history. The fundamental questioning of capitalism – which our contemporary thinkers in their overwhelming majority deem neither ‘possible’ nor ‘desirable’ – is nonetheless the inescapable condition for the emancipation of the dominated workers and the peoples (those of the peripheries, i.e. 80% of mankind). And the two dimensions of the challenges are inextricably linked with one another. There will be no exit from capitalism by way of the sole struggle of the people of the North, or by the sole struggle of the dominated people of the South. There will only be an exit from capitalism if and when these two dimensions of the challenge will combine with one another. It is far from ‘certain’ that this will occur, in which case capitalism will be overcome by the destruction of the civilisation (beyond the malaise in civilisation, to use Freud’s terminology) and perhaps life on the planet. The scenario of a ‘remake’ of the twentieth century falls short of the requirements of a commitment by mankind to the long route of the transition towards worldwide socialism. The liberal catastrophe requires a renewal of the radical critique of capitalism. The challenge is that which confronts the permanent construction/reconstruction of the internationalism of the workers and the peoples in the face of the cosmopolitanism of oligarchic capital.

Constructing this internationalism can only be envisaged by successful, new, revolutionary advances (like those begun in Latin America and Nepal) which offer the perspective of an overcoming of capitalism.

In the countries of the South, the battle of the States and the nations for a negotiated globalisation without hegemonies – the contemporary form of de-linking – supported by the organisation of the demands of the popular classes can circumscribe and limit the powers of the ‘oligopoles’ of the imperialist triad. The democratic forces in the countries of the North must support this battle. The ‘democratic’ discourse that is proposed – and accepted by a majority on the left as it stands – and the ‘humanitarian’ interventions conducted in its name, just like the miserable practices of giving ‘aid’, eschew real engagement with this challenge.

In the countries of the North, the ‘oligopoles’ are already clearly forms of the ‘common good’ whose management cannot be left to sectional private interests alone (the crisis has highlighted the catastrophic results of such an approach). An authentic left must dare envision nationalisation as the first inescapable stage of the socialisation of the ‘oligopoles’ by deepening democratic practice. The current crisis enables the conception of a possible crystallisation of a common front of the social and political forces bringing together all the victims of the exclusive power of the ruling oligarchies.
The first wave of the struggles for socialism, that of the twentieth century, has shown the limits of European social-democracies, the communisms of the third international and the popular nationalism of the Bandung era, the demise and collapse of their socialist ambition. The second wave, that of the twenty-first century, must draw lessons from this. In particular, one lesson is to associate the socialisation of economic management and the deepening of the democratisation of society. There will be no socialism without democracy, but equally no democratic advance outside a socialist perspective.

These strategic goals invite us to think the construction of ‘convergences in diversity’ (referring here to the formula used by the World Forum of Alternatives) of the forms of organisation and the struggles of the dominated and exploited classes. And it is not my intention to condemn from the outset the convergences of the forms which in their own way would retrieve the traditions of social-democracy, communism and popular nationalism, or would diverge from them.

According to this perspective, it seems to me to be necessary to think the renewal of a creative Marxism. Marx has never been so useful and necessary in order to understand and transform the world, today even more so than yesterday. Being Marxist in this spirit is to begin with Marx and not to stop with him, or Lenin or Mao, as conceived and practiced by the historical Marxists of the previous century. It is to render onto Marx that which is owed to him: the intelligence to have begun a modern critical thinking, a critique of capitalist reality and a critique of its political, ideological and cultural representations. A creative Marxism must pursue the goal of enriching this critical thinking par excellence. It must not fear to integrate all the input of reflection, in all areas, including those which have wrongly been considered to be ‘foreign’ by the dogmas of historical Marxisms of the past.

**SUITE A TRADUIRE**

*Partie intitulée "Plan de l'ouvrage", dans livre français pages 25, 26 et 27*

Lecture, part 2

Dar es Salam, april 2010

**The North/South conflict remains central in the socialist perspective**

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

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

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

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

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

Not only do the oligopolies dominate the economic life of the countries of the Triad. They monopolize political power for their own advantage, the electoral political parties (right and left) having become their debtors. This situation is, for the foreseeable future, accepted as being ‘legitimate’, in spite of the degradation of democracy that it involves. It will not be threatened until, sometime in the future perhaps, ‘anti-plutocracy fronts’ are able to include on their agenda the abolition of the private management of oligopolies and their socialization, in complex and openly evolving forms.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Defeating military control of the planet by imperialists**

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

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

**Democracy associated with social progress**

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

This discourse on democracy gradually replaced the one supported by the Soviets and their allies:
‘pacific coexistence’, associated with ‘respect’ for the political practices of both parties and for ‘non
interference’ in their internal affairs. The coexistence discourse had had its important moments. For
example, the Stockholm Appeal in the 1950s, reminded people of the real nuclear threat implied by the
aggressive diplomacy employed by the United States since the Potsdam Conference (1945), reinforced
by the atomic bombing of Japan just a few days after the conference. However, at the same time the
choice of this strategy (coexistence and non-interference) was convenient – or could be convenient,
according to circumstances – to the dominant powers in both West and East. For it enabled the
realities of the respective descriptions, ‘capitalist’ and ‘socialist’, to be taken for granted by the
countries of both West and East. It eliminated all serious discussion about the precise nature of the
two systems: that is, from examining the actually existing capitalism of our era (oligopoly capitalism)
and actually existing socialism At first the new democratic discourse was adopted with much
reticence. Many of the main political authorities of the Atlantic alliance saw the inconveniences that
could upset their preferred ‘realpolitik’. It was not until Carter was President of the United States
(rather like Obama today) that the ‘moral’ sermon conveyed by democracy was understood. It was
Mitterand in France who broke with the Gaullist tradition of refusing the ‘division’ imposed on Europe
by the cold war strategy promoted by the United States. Later, the experience of Gorbachev in the
USSR made it clear that rallying to this discourse was a guarantee for catastrophe. The new
‘democratic’ discourse thus bore its fruits. It seemed sufficiently convincing for ‘leftwing’ opinion in
Europe to support it. This was so, not only for the electoral left (the socialist parties) but also those
with a more radical tradition, of which the communist parties were the heir. With ‘eurocommunism’
the consensus became general.
Drawing the lessons from this victory, the ruling classes of imperialist triad have decided to pursue the strategy of centre-staging the debate on “democracy”. China has not been criticised for opening up its economy, but because its political management has been monopolised by the communist party. Cuba’s achievements which have no match across South America have been ignored, putting the focus instead, time and again, on its one-party-system.

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

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

As it appears, it is now necessary more than ever to step up radical criticism. I mean the type of criticism which associates rather than dissociates the democratisation of societies (and not only their practice of political management) with social progress (in a socialist perspective). This criticism cannot dissociate the struggle for democratisation from the struggle for socialism. There can be no socialism without democracy and neither can there be democratic progress outside a socialist prospect.

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

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

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

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

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

Popular movements and peoples in struggle for socialism and liberation from imperialist domination have been at the origin of authentic democratic advances, inventing a theory and a practise which associate democracy and social progress. That evolution – superior to capitalism, its ideology and its narrow practise of representative and procedural democracy – was initiated very early, as early as the French Revolution. It expressed itself in a more mature and more radical manner in subsequent revolutions, during the Commune of Paris, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution and some others (the one of Mexico, Cuba, and Vietnam), as well as in Asia and Africa in the Bandung era.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In conclusion two points should be made.

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

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

"Aid", an additional tool for controlling vulnerable countries

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

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

Sub-Saharan Africa is perfectly integrated into the global system and not at all “marginalised” as many people unfortunately too often speculate without thinking; the external trade of the region represents 45 % of its GDP, compared to 30% for Asia and South America and 15% for each of the three regions making up the triad. Quantitatively therefore Africa is “more” and not “less” integrated but in a different way ( ref : Is Africa really marginalized?; in, Hellen Bauer, History and Philosophy of Sciences, Ibadan, 2003). The geo-economy of the region is based on two sets of productions which are decisive in the shaping of its structures and definition of its position in the global system: (i) “tropical” agricultural exports: coffee, cocoa, cotton, peanut, fruits, palm oil etc, (ii) hydrocarbons and mining: copper, gold, precious metals, diamond etc. The former provide the “survival” means beyond the food produced for their own consumption by farmers who are financing the State’s graft on the local economy and also the reproduction of the “middle classes” through public spending. The local ruling classes are more interested in these productions than the dominant economies. The latter are much more interested in the proceeds from the natural resources of the continent. The interest today is in hydrocarbons and rare minerals and tomorrow it may well be in reserves for the development of agro fuel, the sun (when long distance conveyance of solar energy becomes possible in the next few decades), water (when its direct or indirect export will be made possible).
The race for securing rural territories that can accommodate the expansion of agro fuels has already started in South America. From this perspective, Africa offers vast possibilities. Malagasy has ignited the movement and has already conceded large areas of lands in the western part of the country. The implementation of the Congolese Rural Code (2008) inspired by Belgian cooperation and FAO will certainly allow agribusiness to secure agrarian lands on a large scale for the purpose of “developing” them just as the Mining Code had allowed the plundering of the colony’s mineral resources in the past. The useless farmers will pay the price; their foreseeable extreme impoverishment will perhaps attract the interest of future humanitarian aid and “aid” programmes for poverty reduction! The new phase of history that has just started is characterised by sharpened conflicts for access to the natural resources of the planet. The triad intends to have exclusive access to this “useful” Africa (that of reserves of natural resources) and prevent the “emerging countries” whose needs in that area are already overwhelming and will grow bigger and bigger, from gaining access to them. The guarantee of this exclusive access requires political control and reducing vulnerable African States to the state of “client States”. It is therefore not misleading to consider that the objective of aid is to “corrupt” the ruling classes. Beyond financial levies (alas widely known though usually commented upon as if donors played no part in it!), aid discharges very well this political function having become “essential” (since it has become an important source of budget financing). It is then necessary to conceive aid to become permanent and not to prepare for its disappearance through consistent development. Also important is the fact that this aid should not be exclusively and entirely reserved for the ruling classes, the “government”. It should also arouse the interest of the “oppositions” capable of succeeding them. At this point, the role of the so-called civil society and some NGOs becomes relevant. To be really politically efficient, the aid in question should also contribute to maintaining farmer integration into this global system, as this integration feeds an additional source of government revenue.

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

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

Even taken seriously (therefore overlooking its abusive use), does the “civil society” concept has the necessary elevation that is required of a concept to kick off and be given consideration in a serious and scientific-oriented debate? As proposed to us, “the civil society” in question is associated with a consensus ideology. A double consensus: (i) that there is no alternative to the “market economy” (a gross expression by itself to serve as a substitute for the analysis of past and contemporary “really existing capitalism”); (ii) that there is no alternative to representative democracy founded on electoral multiparty system (conceived as “democracy”), to serve as a substitute for a society democratisation concept which by itself is a never-ending process.
In counterpoint, struggles in history have allowed the emergence of political cultures founded on the recognition of conflict of social and national interests, giving, inter-alia, some meaning to the terms “right” and “left” by which the right and power to imagine alternatives and not exclusively “alternations” in the exercise of power (changing names to do the same thing) is conferred on creative democracy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The theory of the ‘market economy’ has always been the backbone of ‘vulgar economics’. This theory immediately eliminates the whole, essential reality – social relationships of production (particularly, ownership as the immediate expression of these relationships, promoted to a sacred principle). It is replaced by the hypothesis of a society constituted by ‘individuals’ (who, in the final analysis, become active agents in the reproduction of the system and its evolution). These ‘individuals’ (homo œconomicus) are ahistorical, identical with those who, since the origins of humanity (Robinson Crusoe) have possessed the same, unchanging qualities (egoism, the capacity to calculate and to make choices that benefit themselves). Thus building the ‘market economy’ on these foundations does not therefore represent a serious formulation of historical and real capitalism. It constructs an imaginary system into which it integrates almost nothing of the essentials of the capitalist reality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Will the conflict centre/periphery mobilise all the Southern countries? This was the case in the Bandung era, despite the huge differences between the Southern countries of the time, not less marked than today. But this possibility is not certain. The emerging countries – the real periphery of contemporary capitalism – could nurture the illusion that they can, like the imperialist countries, even if it is in acute competition with them, benefit from the plundering of the resources of the devastated peripheries (a reality that was repeated in history) which are thereby particularly powerless.
What should be understood is that there is no room for an "acceptable global alternative consensus" as Stiglitz and others suggest (see my critiques of those projects on Pambazuka site). Therefore the South must first take independent initiatives, in order to change in its favour the balances of forces, thus compelling the center to later negotiate acceptable consensus.

**Africa, a particularly vulnerable region in globalisation in crisis**

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

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

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

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

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

The tragedy is that African intellectuals on the whole were duped by these discourses which presented the big project of African Renaissance as a “grandiloquent, nationalist and unrealistic” drift. Of course, one forgets to say that the countries that became “emerging” are precisely those that progressed in industrialisation in double time.
Africa today is then bound to no longer have ambition beyond its adjustment on a day-to-day basis to the requirements of the pursuit of the expansion of the capitalism of oligopolies; a way which we said could only lead to absolute disaster. In this perspective, Africa only exists for her natural resources it offers to plunder: the resources of its subsoil (hydrocarbons, gold, diamonds and even more important, rare minerals), her lands now offered to the expansion of agribusiness for new export productions (agrofuels and other).

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