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## Introduction

The title chosen for the French edition of this book, *Pour un monde multipolaire*, should already be indicative of the author's political position. Yes, I do want to see the construction of a multipolar world, and that obviously means the defeat of Washington's hegemonist project for military control of the planet. In my eyes it is an overweening project, criminal by its very nature, which is drawing the world into wars without end and stifling all hope of social and democratic advance, not only in the countries of the South but also, to a seemingly lesser degree, in those of the North. In this connection, I wrote as long ago as 1991 of the emergence of an 'empire of chaos'.

The term 'multipolar world' calls for some clarification. Like other widely used expressions in the realm of politics, it remains unclear unless and until it is given a precise meaning. For my own part, it implies a recognition that the social system in which we live is thoroughly 'global' or 'globalized', and that any alternative to globalization based on the principles of liberal capitalism (or its more extreme 'neoliberal' form) can itself be nothing other than 'global'. In other words, I am a champion of what has been called 'alter-globalization', not an advocate of 'anti-globalization' in the sense of opposition to any form of globalization. That seems to me not only unrealistic but undesirable.

Disagreements therefore centre on what is meant by multipolarity. Some think of it as a means of 'restoring balance' in the Atlantic alliance, or of ensuring that the other two partners in the triad (the European

Union, or its major powers, and Japan) have a position equal to that of the United States in the running of world affairs. Others go further and argue that there is a need for large countries such as China, Russia, India and Brazil, perhaps even some more or less 'emerging' countries in the South, to have a place in the concert of the major powers.

So far as I am concerned, this is a quite inadequate conception of multipolarity: it does not hold out a satisfactory answer to the real challenges facing the peoples of the world, nor the prospect of social progress that can alone provide a reliable and robust basis for democratization. In other words, my idea of the multipolarity that is necessary today entails a radical revision of 'North-South relations', in all their dimensions. This revision must create a framework that makes it possible to reduce the power of forces within the system (the capitalist system, to call it by its name) that operate in such a way as to exacerbate the polarization of wealth and power. By calling into question the 'imperialist' tradition, or whatever one likes to call it, which governs core-periphery relations in the actually existing capitalist system (something quite different from the general market system dreamed up by mainstream economists), such a revision would automatically pose a challenge to the most fundamental aspects of capitalism. But I should immediately make it clear that, beyond differences of analysis concerning the nature of the system and what appears to be possible or desirable, my argument is intended to open a political debate with all who refuse to align themselves with the unilateralist project of US hegemonism.

### Being clear about the nature of capitalism and imperialism

The conception of capitalism as a global system, more than and different from a mere juxtaposition of societies at various stages of capitalist transformation, is not a new idea of mine. The first book I wrote, in 1954-55, already bore the title *Accumulation on a World Scale*, and since then a global vision has been central to my analyses and proposed goals of struggles to 'change the world'. This is not the place to go back over what I have written on these questions. I shall therefore summarize my conclusions by simply recalling that I identify four main phases in

the modern globalization associated with capitalist expansion. The first two I call (1) the *mercantilist* phase (1500-1800), during which Atlantic Europe established the core-periphery system through the conquest and reshaping of the Americas, the development of the slave trade and early commercial assaults on Asia (and, to a lesser degree, Africa), and (2) the *classical* phase (1800-1950) of the system, based on a division between industrialized cores and non-industrialized peripheries and a related tendency to reduce the latter to a colonial or semi-colonial status. In (3) the *post-war* phase (1950-1980), the victory of national liberation movements and/or socialist revolutions (which I interpret as radical forms of national liberation) enabled the peripheries to impose a revision of the old asymmetrical terms of the global system and to enter the industrial age. This period of 'negotiated' globalization was exceptional, and it is interesting to note that the world then experienced growth that was the strongest known in history, as well as the least uneven in terms of the distribution of what was produced. In today's *new phase* (4), a global system is being constructed in which the cores (the triad) benefit from 'five monopolies' (more about these later) that give them control over reproduction of the system.

The modern global system of actually existing capitalism has always been polarizing by nature, through the very operation of what I call the 'globalized law of value', as distinct from the law of value *tout court*. In my analysis, therefore, polarization and imperialism are synonymous. I am not among those who reserve the term 'imperialist' for types of political behaviour designed to subjugate one nation to another - behaviour that can be found through the successive ages of the human story, associated with various modes of production and social organization. My analytic interest is anyway geared only to the imperialism of modern times, the product of the immanent logic of capitalist expansion.

In this sense, imperialism is not a stage of capitalism but the permanent feature of its global expansion, which since its earliest beginnings has always produced a polarization of wealth and power in favour of the core countries. The 'monopolies' enjoyed by the cores in their asymmetrical relations with the peripheries of the system define each of the successive phases in the history of the globalized imperialist system.

From the Industrial Revolution (early nineteenth century) to the decades following the Second World War, the monopoly in question was

an industrial monopoly; core and periphery were then synonymous with industrialized and non-industrialized countries. We can understand why national liberation movements in the periphery made industrialization their priority, within a wider perspective of 'catching up'. Their success forced imperialism to adapt to this demand. This does not mean that they actually took the road of 'catching up', nor that we entered a 'post-imperialist' period of history. For [the core countries then reorganized around new monopolies, which gave them control over technologies and access to the world's natural resources, over international financial flows, communications and the production of weapons of mass destruction.] These monopolies cannot fail to reproduce and deepen polarization on a world scale.

Imperialism, from its sixteenth-century origins to the Second World War, was a plural phenomenon; permanent, often violent, conflict between different imperialisms played an important role in shaping the world. In this respect, the Second World War ended with a major transformation, since a collective imperialism of the 'triad' (USA, Europe, Japan) then replaced the multiplicity of imperialisms.

I would suggest that the formation of a new collective imperialism originated in the transformation of competitive conditions. Whereas a few decades ago the large corporations still waged their competitive battles essentially on national markets, the market size now required for victory in the first round of matches is approaching 500 to 600 million 'potential consumers'. The battle therefore has to be fought out directly on the world market, and those who win there can subsequently assert themselves in their own home patch as well. A deeper globalization thus becomes the primary framework for the activity of large corporations. Or, to put it in another way, the causality has been reversed in the national/global couplet: national strength used to control global presence, but today the opposite is the case. Transnational corporations, whatever their country of origin, therefore have common interests in running the world market. These interests overlap with the constant mercantile conflicts that define all the forms of competition peculiar to capitalism.

The dominant segments of transnational capital in all the partners of the triad have a real solidarity with one another that is expressed in their rallying to globalized neoliberalism. The United States is seen as the defender (if necessary the military defender) of these common interests.

But Washington has no intention of sharing 'equitably' the profits of its leadership. On the contrary, it seeks to reduce its allies within the triad to the status of vassals, and is unwilling to allow them more than minor concessions. Is this clash of interests within dominant capital likely to become so pronounced that it leads to a break in the Atlantic alliance?

The conception of globalization that I defend below is one of real and complete multipolarity, in the sense that it gives a place to all nations on earth and concerns 100 per cent of humanity. It contrasts with the truncated multipolarity of all those who implicitly, if not always explicitly, think first of the core triad countries (15 per cent of humanity) and only afterwards grant a few concessions at most to the other 85 per cent. I have always rejected that systematic distortion bound up with the West-centrism of the dominant culture.

### Is there a desirable form of globalization?

Since modern globalization and capitalism are inseparable, the globalization that one regards as 'desirable' (unipolar, hierarchically multipolar, non-hierarchically multipolar) will depend on whether one's preferred model of society is liberal capitalism, a more 'social' form of capitalism, or one or another form of socialism. Any option in favour of 'normal' (essentially liberal) capitalism implies an imperialist posture in North-South relations, in accordance with the immanent logic of capital accumulation. At the other end of the spectrum, I would place a radically anti-imperialist approach that recognizes the need to correct the huge North-South inequality in the conditions of production created by five centuries of capitalist expansion. Such a correction evidently implies a socialist perspective (one that goes beyond the basic logic of capital accumulation), but it also requires a conception of global socialism not necessarily shared either by earlier historical socialisms (communist and social-democratic) or by all the currents of new social, and even socialist, thinking.

In what follows, an attempt will always be made to draw out the relationship between proposals for an alternative globalization and certain conceptions of society. The analyses in this work are 'geopolitical', but I should stress that they are in no way inspired by the methods of

conventional geopolitics. That discipline, which originated in the nationalist ruling-class thought of the imperialist countries, treats nation-states as homogeneous invariables, with 'interests' dictated by their geographical location and economic ambitions usually identified with those of the dominant sections of capital. These are the limitations of otherwise excellent works of mainstream geopolitics, such as Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.

My own approach starts from the observation that all countries, in both core and periphery, are beset with social contradictions, and that visions of the society and its place in the international order are not unified at a supposedly national level. Even when a semblance of consensus appears to align the popular classes with their government, rulers and ruled do not necessarily have the same perception of internal or external challenges and of the responses that need to be made to them. I therefore place the emphasis on the contradictions, since only this will allow us to gauge the likelihood of the various conceivable 'scenarios', and to spell out the difficult but possible options that I would like to see strengthened. My analyses will seek to take into account the viewpoints of what are called the social movements (especially the 'alter-globalization' movement), as well as the proposals they explicitly or implicitly put forward.

Without simplifying too much, I would say that the hegemonic blocs in the core countries, which are structured around the dominant segments of capital (especially transnational finance), have an economically 'liberal' and imperialist conception of North-South relations. Conflicts between the state powers in the core take place within this narrowly defined framework – for example, conflicts over whether they should line up with the strategies of US hegemonism or try to limit or even escape their effects. But other hegemonic blocs are possible (particularly in Europe), and we need to examine the conditions under which they might emerge and the range of alternatives they might advance. Such alternative blocs will not necessarily be called upon to make a radical break with the requirements of capitalism, but they may very well force capitalism to adapt to certain demands that do not conform to its peculiar logic. Similarly, I would say that the hegemonic blocs currently in place in the peripheral countries – whose diversity must, of course, be carefully analysed – are of a 'comprador' nature: that is, the interests

they promote are situated within the logic of the expansion of global capitalism as it exists today. Here too, however, alternative blocs are possible, and if successful they might compel the global system to adapt to their demands.

In order to make this book read more smoothly, I have decided to group all references to useful complementary sources in an appendix.

capable of absorbing such tendencies without having to face a challenge to its fundamental modes of exploitation and oppression. Today the writings of a Castells or Negri propose lending scientific legitimacy to this call to do nothing in the end, on the grounds that everything will be done 'naturally' by itself.

By contrast, it remains centrally important to discuss what is needed to carry the social movement forward, since the movement must become the political force promoting change in the social relationship of forces and, therefore, in the systems of rule. There is not a shadow of doubt that this requires the invention of a 'different kind of politics', but such a formulation is too vague to be anything other than hollow.

The social forums are today confronted with a decisive choice. They can become the sites for the patient construction of new fronts, with the capacity to foster the convergence in diversity of all the progressive forces on earth. To this end, I would propose the working out of joint platforms that reject both neoliberalism and the US-controlled militarization of globalization. A broad, open alliance of movements within this perspective would make it possible to place the emphasis on the construction of positive alternatives. So far as I am concerned, it goes without saying that this excludes reactionary social movements – which implies an end to the ambiguous attitudes that major sections of the left display towards them, since otherwise the social forums will become bazaars from which not much can be expected. The dominant system naturally encourages trends in that direction, which allow it to claim that it is playing the game of democracy. But the democracy to which this would lead is an impotent democracy, incapable of producing alternative political strategies that are coherent and effective. And that can only serve to strengthen the power of the system.

## APPENDIX I

### Multipolarity in the twentieth century

The Old World systems were nearly always multipolar, although up to now multipolarity has never been truly general or equal. Thus, hegemony has always been more an objective pursued by the powerful than an actual reality. When hegemony has existed, it has always been relative and provisional.

The partners in the multipolar world of the nineteenth century (which continued until 1945) were scarcely anything other than the 'powers' of their age. Within the contemporary triad, there are probably some who hanker after those times and their characteristic 'balance of power'. But that is not the multipolarity which most of the people on earth (85 per cent) would like to see.

The multipolar world ushered in by the Russian Revolution, then partly imposed by the Asian and African liberation movements, was of a quite different nature. The conventional analysis of the period after the Second World War, which speaks of it in terms of 'bipolarity' and 'cold war', does not give due recognition to the advances of the South. My own approach places the multipolarity of the time in the framework of the real clash of civilizations, which, beyond the deforming ideological expressions, concerned the conflict between capitalism and its possible overcoming by socialism. Whether or not they had made a socialist revolution, the striving of the peoples of the periphery to abolish the effects of polarization due to capitalist expansion necessarily inserted itself into an anti-capitalist perspective.

This is why the reading I shall propose here centres on the strong political solidarity that the conflict between capitalism and socialism inspired, which in turn governed the conceptions of multipolarity peculiar to the second half of the twentieth century.

### The drama of the great revolutions

The 'great revolutions' stand out because they projected themselves far into the future, unlike 'ordinary revolutions', which merely respond to the need for change on the immediate agenda.

In the modern era, only three major revolutions may be considered great in this sense – the French, the Russian and the Chinese; while comparable revolutions occurred on a smaller scale in Mexico, Yugoslavia, Vietnam and Cuba. The French Revolution was not only a 'bourgeois revolution' that substituted the capitalist order for the *ancien régime* and bourgeois power for the power of the aristocracy; it was also a people's (especially a peasants') revolution, whose demands challenged the bourgeois order itself. The radical democratic and secular republic, which set itself the ideal of spreading small-scale property to all, did not stem from the mere logic of capital accumulation (based on inequality), but negated that logic and clearly said as much by declaring economic liberalism to be the enemy of democracy. In this sense, the French Revolution already contained the seeds of the socialist revolutions to come, whose 'objective' preconditions evidently did not exist in France at the time (as the fate of Babeuf and his followers showed). The Russian and Chinese revolutions, with which those of Vietnam and Cuba may also be associated, set themselves the goal of communism, although that too was ahead of the objective requirement to solve the immediate problems of the societies in question.

Consequently, all the great revolutions suffered the effects of being ahead of their time and had great difficulty stabilizing themselves; their brief moments of radicalism were succeeded by retreats and reactionary restorations. By contrast, the other revolutions (such as those in England and the United States) heralded a calm and stable deployment of the system, merely registering the requirements of social and political relations already established within the framework of nascent capitalism. In fact, they do not really deserve the name 'revolutions', so striking were

their compromises with the forces of the past and their lack of vision for a more distant future.

In spite of their 'defeats', the great revolutions made history – if we consider their long-term impact. By virtue of the *avant-garde* values defining their project, they enabled creative utopias to seek to win over people's minds and, in the end, to achieve the highest goal of modernity: to make human beings the active subjects of their history. These values contrast with those of the bourgeois order established elsewhere, which, by fostering passive adaptation to the supposedly objective requirements of the deployment of capital, gave full force to the economic alienation underlying such adaptation.

### The weight of imperialism, the permanent stage of the global expansion of capitalism

Since its inception, and at every stage in its history, the global deployment of capitalism has always been polarizing. Yet this characteristic of actually existing capitalism has always been underestimated, to say the least, because of the Eurocentrism dominating modern thought, even in the *avant-garde* ideological formations peculiar to the great revolutions. The historical Marxism of the successive Internationals only partly escaped this general rule.

To understand the immensity of this imperialist reality, and to draw all the strategic consequences for the changing of the world, is the first indispensable task that all social and political forces on the receiving end of it have to face, in both the core and the periphery. For what imperialism has brought about is not so much a maturing of conditions for 'socialist revolutions' (or accelerated tendencies in that direction) in the centres of the world system, as challenges to its order through revolts in the periphery. It is no accident that Russia was the 'weak link' in the system in 1917, or that revolution in the name of socialism then shifted eastward to China and elsewhere, whereas the collapse in the West on which Lenin pinned his hopes failed to materialize. The countries that underwent revolution therefore faced the dual, contradictory task of 'catching up' (with methods similar to those of capitalism) and 'doing something else' ('building socialism'). This combination turned out as

it did in the various countries; it might perhaps have been better, in the sense of allowing communist aspirations to grow stronger as advances were made in catching up. In any event, this real contradiction crucially shaped the objective conditions under which the post-revolutionary societies evolved.

The forms of political action and organization developed by 'revolutionary parties' (in this case, the Communists of the Third International) remained trapped in the idea that the revolution was 'imminent', that the 'objective conditions' for it were present. The Party therefore had to make up for what was lacking: it had to become an organization to 'make the revolution', and therefore, under the circumstances, to stress homogeneity (later 'monolithism') and an almost military discipline. The parties in question maintained these forms of organization, even when the perspective of an immediate revolutionary assault was abandoned in the late 1920s. They were then placed in the service of a quite different objective: protection of the Soviet state, both internally and externally.

In the peripheries of globalized capitalism – by definition, the 'storm zone' in the imperialist system – a form of revolution did remain on the agenda. But its objective was still essentially blurred and ambiguous. Was it national liberation from imperialism (and preservation of much, or even most, of the social relations characteristic of capitalist modernity), or was it something more? Both in the radical revolutions of China, Vietnam and Cuba, and in the less radical ones in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the question was still: 'to catch up' or 'to do something else'? This challenge was in turn linked to another priority task: defence of the encircled Soviet Union.

### **Defence of the post-revolutionary states central to the vanguard's strategic choices**

The Soviet Union, and later China, found themselves confronted with a dominant capitalism and Western powers systematically seeking to isolate them. Let us just recall that, for a third of the short history of the United States, the strategy of this hegemonic power of the capitalist system has focused on the goal of destroying its two enemies, whether truly socialist or not; and that Washington has managed to draw into this strategy its subaltern allies in the other centres of the triad (Europe

and Japan) and the countries of the periphery, gradually substituting the role of comprador classes for that of classes with roots in the people's liberation movement.

It is easy to understand that, since revolution was not on the immediate agenda elsewhere, priority was usually given to defence of the post-revolutionary states. This became the central issue shaping political strategy – in the Soviet Union under Lenin and then Stalin and his successors, in Maoist and post-Maoist China, in the national-populist regimes of Asia and Africa, and among the Communist vanguards (whether lined up behind Moscow or Beijing or neither).

The Soviet Union and China experienced the vicissitudes of a great revolution at the same time that they faced the consequences of the uneven expansion of world capitalism. Both post-revolutionary regimes gradually sacrificed their original objectives to the immediate requirements of 'catching up' – a slide which, by substituting state management for Marx's communist goal of social ownership and by using brutal (sometimes bloody) dictatorial methods to stifle popular democracy, paved the way for the later rush towards capitalist restoration that is common to the two countries (despite the different roads they have travelled). The instruments deployed internally for 'defence of the post-revolutionary state' went hand in hand with external strategies that prioritized the same goal. Communist parties were asked to line up behind these choices, not only in their general strategic direction but even in their day-to-day tactical adjustments. This could not fail to produce a rapid weakening of their capacity for critical thought, as abstract talk of revolution (still supposedly 'imminent') and the maintenance of quasi-military forms of organization came hell or high water detached them from analysis of the real contradictions of society.

The vanguards that refused such a crippling alignment, in some cases daring to look the post-revolutionary societies in the face, did not give up the original Leninist hypothesis of the imminence of revolution, even though it had been ever more visibly refuted in reality. This was the case with Trotskyism and the parties of the Fourth International. It was also true of many activist revolutionary organizations: from the Philippines to India (Naxalites inspired by Maoism), and from the Arab world (Arab nationalists and their followers in South Yemen) to Latin America (Guevarism).



### **Nation-building and/or socialist construction in the radical countries of the periphery**

The great national liberation movements of Asia and Africa that came into open conflict with the imperialist order, like those that led revolutions in the name of socialism, had to face the conflicting demands of 'catching up' ('nation-building') and transforming social relations in favour of the popular classes. With regard to the second of these tasks, the 'post-revolutionary' (or simply post-independence) regimes of Asia and Africa were certainly less radical than the Communist regimes — which is why I call them 'national-populist'. Sometimes they drew inspiration from organizational forms (single party, undemocratic rule, a state-run economy) that had been developed in the experiences of 'actually existing socialism', but they generally watered them down through vague ideological choices and compromises with the past.

These were the conditions under which the regimes in place, as well as the critical vanguards (historical Communism), were asked to support the Soviet Union (or, more rarely, China) and invited to enjoy its support. The constitution of this common front against the imperialist aggression of the United States and its European and Japanese partners was certainly beneficial to the peoples of Asia and Africa; it created a degree of autonomy both for the initiatives of their ruling classes and for the activity of popular classes. The proof of this is what happened subsequently, after the Soviet collapse. Even before it, those ruling classes which opted for 'the West' on the illusory grounds that this would be favourable to them obtained nothing in the end. (In Sadat's Egypt, the main case in point, the calculation was that a friendly United States, holding nearly all the cards on the Palestinian issue, could turn the situation round in favour of the Arab and Palestinian cause!) Indeed, their capitulation encouraged the deployment of the strategic offensives of imperialism and, in the case of Israel, strengthened the Washington-Tel Aviv axis.

This is not to say that Moscow did not impose dubious conditions on political forces that were ranged alongside the popular classes in countries allied to it — and, in particular, on the local Communist parties. One might have thought that, within the anti-imperialist front, these parties would preserve all their autonomy of movement — a recognition of

the conflicting interests and social projects among the partners involved in the front. For the ruling classes were ultimately pursuing a capitalist (though also 'national') project, whereas the satisfaction of popular class interests required going beyond a perspective whose narrow limits had already been demonstrated in history. But the fact is that the Soviet state fed the illusions that the national capitalist project carried within it, and thereby undermined the autonomous expression of the popular classes. The invention of a theory of the 'non-capitalist road' expressed this choice.

There can be no doubt that during the Bandung era (1955–75) it was difficult to draw a distinction between the interests of governments and the interests of their peoples. The regimes had only recently emerged out of huge national liberation movements (which had routed imperialism in its old 'colonial' or 'semi-colonial' forms), or sometimes out of genuine revolutions associated with those movements, as in China, Vietnam and Cuba. They were still 'close' to their peoples, and enjoyed great legitimacy.

The example of Arab Communism sheds some light on the tragic consequences of this rallying to the idea of a 'non-capitalist road'. A large majority of Arab Communists accepted the Soviet proposals and became, at best, the 'left wing' of the anti-imperialist national-populist regimes, giving them scarcely critical, virtually unconditional support. Two examples of this were the self-dissolution of the Egyptian Communist Party in 1965, in the deluded hope that it would be allowed to breathe new life into the Nasserite Socialist Party; and the rallying of Khaled Bagdash in Syria to the thesis that only nation-building (not even spelled out as non-capitalist) was the order of the day. I have expressed my views on this elsewhere, most notably at the time when many of the activists of the period were publishing their memoirs in Egypt. I concluded that Arab Communism as a whole had not essentially left the framework of the 'national-populist' project, and had failed to see that in the end this fitted into a strictly capitalist perspective. This was not an 'opportunist' conjunctural orientation on its part, but a structural choice that expressed the original deficiencies of the Communist parties in question, the ambiguity of the ideologies they promoted, and ultimately their ignorance of the popular classes whose immediate and long-term interests they were supposed to be defending. The result of this unfortunate option was a

loss of Communist credibility once the national-populist regimes reached their historical limits and suffered an erosion of legitimacy. Since the Communist left had not presented itself as an alternative beyond national populism, a vacuum was created on the political stage that opened the way for the disastrous rise of political Islam.

It is true that small numbers of Arab Communists rejected this unconditional rallying to the policies of the Soviet state; the examples of the Qawmiyin and their emulators in South Yemen, or a few other 'Maoist' nuclei, bear testimony to this. But they did not depart from the original Leninist thesis that revolution was 'imminent', which they shared with the Guevarist movements of Latin America and the Naxalites in India. The defeat of the courageous movements they inspired shows with hindsight that Lenin's thesis was wrong and based on tragic simplifications.

The no less tragic history of the South African Communist Party forms part of a similar downward slide. In the 1930s the SACP enjoyed the support of a majority of the African popular classes, while the ANC comprised only a minority of the petty bourgeoisie. Yet, on Moscow's advice, the Party wound itself up and offered the leadership of the national movement to the ANC on a platter, with the consequences we know.

In contrast, the Indian Communists, under the influence of Maoism, mostly kept a critical distance from Congress and rejected the thesis of a 'non-capitalist road'. As we have seen in the chapter on India, this is doubtless why they have survived the disaster and are in a better position than others to face the new challenges.

A further contrast is the sizeable fraction of the Latin American left which, under Cuban influence, detached itself from official Communism. The polemics that took place on this occasion – under the banner of the first version of *dependencia* theory – served useful functions and explain, at least in part, why the attachment to democracy has more solid roots there.

### Opening debate on the long transition to world socialism

While recognizing Lenin's mistaken view of the real challenges, and his misjudgement of the ripeness for revolution, we need to go beyond criticism and self-criticism of the history of twentieth-century

Communism, by openly and inventively fostering debate on the positive alternative strategies for the twenty-first century.

Here I can do no more than briefly summarize the points I have made elsewhere.

- Strategies must be devised in response to the challenges of the long transition from world capitalism to world socialism.
- In the course of this long transition, social, economic and political systems produced by the struggles of the reproductive elements of capitalist society will combine, in contradictory fashion, with elements tending to initiate and develop socialist social relations. Two conflicting logics will therefore be present, in permanent combination and permanent contradiction with each other.
- Progress in this direction is necessary and possible in all regions of the world capitalist system, both the imperialist centres and the compradorized peripheries. Of course, by force of circumstance, there will have to be concrete and specific intermediate stages, especially with regard to the contrasts between centres and peripheries.
- Social, ideological and political forces expressing, however confusedly, the interests of popular classes are already working in the directions indicated. The so-called 'alter-globalization' movements are material proof of this. But these movements serve as vehicles for different alternatives, some progressive (in the above sense), some deluded or even clearly reactionary (para-fascist responses to the challenges). To politicize the debate – in the true and proper sense of the term – is the *sine qua non* for building what I call 'convergence in diversity' of the progressive forces.
- The victims of the deployment of neoliberal capitalism are the majority in all parts of the world, and socialism must be capable of mobilizing the new historical opportunity this creates. But it will be able to do this only if it can take account of the changes resulting from the technological revolutions, which have completely altered the social architecture once and for all. Communism must no longer be the banner only of the 'industrial working class', in the old sense of the term; it can become the banner representing the future of the broad majority of working people, despite the diversity of their situations. To rebuild the unity of working people – both those who benefit from a

certain stabilization of the system and those who are excluded from it – is today a major challenge for the inventive thinking that is needed for communist renewal. In the peripheries, this also means organizing huge movements to establish an equal right of access to the land for the whole peasantry. Renewal is all the more necessary because it has often been forgotten that the peasantry is still a half of humanity, and that capitalism in all its forms is incapable of solving this major problem.

- An effective strategy for action within this perspective must be capable of producing simultaneous advances in three directions: social progress, democratization and the construction of a pluricentric world system. The political democracy usually proposed as an accompaniment to the economic options of liberal capitalism is destined to strip democracy of all credibility, in quite dramatic ways. At the same time, social progress from the top down is no longer acceptable as a substitute for inventive formulas involving the democratic power of popular classes. There will be no socialism without democracy, but also no democratic advances without social progress. Lastly, in view of the persistence of national diversity and the political cultures shaping it, as well as the inequality historically produced by the deployment of world capitalism, it is clear that a margin of opportunity for the necessary social and democratic advances will require the construction of a pluricentric world system. And the first condition for this, of course, is to defeat Washington's project for military control of the planet.

## APPENDIX II

### Further reading

This work focuses on the geopolitics of certain major issues – a deliberate choice on my part, motivated by the fact that the 'social movements' of our time shy away from this dimension. Geopolitics is part of 'politics'. But the social movements generally believe that politics is 'bad', that nothing good can come of it, and that we need to dissociate ourselves from it in order to change the world. Some have tried to give a theoretical justification for this attitude, which in my view involves a failure to assume the necessary responsibilities. If 'politics' is bad, the solution is not to abolish it – which is anyway an impossibility – but to engage in 'good politics'. The reader will certainly be able to gauge the distance between my own geopolitical analysis and more conventional approaches. I have always stressed that the distinctive logics of social (and hence political) systems are closely linked to those governing the current or projected forms of globalization. However, given my focus here on geopolitical aspects, only passing reference has been made to their relationship with social systems. I would therefore like to add a few further points by way of suggestions for further reading.

#### On the nature of actually existing capitalism

1. The critique of 'pure economics' (the economics of an imaginary capitalist system), and the requirements for a political economy of 'actually existing capitalism' (what I call 'underdetermination' in history). A