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Imperialism and Globalization

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Imperialism is not a stage, not even the highest stage, of capitalism: from the beginning, it is inherent in capitalism's expansion. The imperialist conquest of the planet by the Europeans and their North American children was carried out in two phases and is perhaps entering a third.

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The first phase of this devastating enterprise was organized around the conquest of the Americas, in the framework of the mercantilist system of Atlantic Europe at the time. The net result was the destruction of the Indian civilizations and their Hispanicization- Christianization, or simply the total genocide on which the United States was built. The fundamental racism of the Anglo-Saxon colonists explains why this model was reproduced elsewhere, in Australia, in Tasmania (the most complete genocide in history), and in New Zealand. For whereas the Catholic Spaniards acted in the name of the religion that had to be imposed on conquered peoples, the Anglo-Protestants took from their reading of the Bible the right to wipe out the "infidels." The infamous slavery of the Blacks, made necessary by the extermination of the Indians—or their resistance—briskly took over to ensure that the useful parts of the continent were "turned to account." No one today has any doubt as to the real motives for all these horrors or is ignorant of their intimate relation to the expansion of mercantile capital. Nevertheless, the contemporary Europeans accepted the ideological discourse that

justified them, and the voices of protest—that of Las Casas, for example—did not find many sympathetic listeners.

The disastrous results of this first chapter of world capitalist expansion produced, some time later, the forces of liberation that challenged the logics that produced them. The first revolution of the Western Hemisphere was that of the slaves of Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti) at the end of the eighteenth century, followed more than a century later by the Mexican revolution of the decade of 1910, and fifty years after that by the Cuban revolution. And if I do not cite here either the famous "American revolution" or that of the Spanish colonies that soon followed, it is because those only transferred the power of decision from the metropolis to the colonists so that they could go on doing the same thing, pursue the same project with even greater brutality, but without having to share the profits with the "mother country."

The second phase of imperialist devastation was based on the industrial revolution and manifested itself in the colonial subjection of Asia and Africa. "To open the markets"—like the market for opium forced on the Chinese by the Puritans of England—and to seize the natural resources of the globe were the real motives here, as everyone knows today. But again, European opinion—including the workers' movement of the Second International—did not see these realities and accepted the new legitimizing discourse of capital. This time, it was the famous "civilizing mission." The voices that expressed the clearest thinking at the time were those of cynical bourgeoises, like Cecil Rhodes, who envisaged colonial conquest so as to avoid social revolution in England. Again, the voices of protest—from the Paris Commune to the Bolsheviks—had little resonance.

This second phase of imperialism is at the origin of the greatest problem with which mankind has ever been confronted: the overwhelming polarization that has increased the inequality between peoples from a maximum ratio of two to one around 1800, to sixty to one today, with only 20 percent of the earth's population being included in the centers that benefit from the system. At the same time, these prodigious achievements of capitalist civilization gave rise to the most violent confrontations between the imperialist powers that the world has ever seen. Imperialist aggression again produced the forces that resisted its project: the socialist revolutions that took place in Russia and China (not accidentally all occurred within the peripheries that were victims of the polarizing expansion of really existing capitalism) and the revolutions of national liberation. Their victory brought about a half-century of respite, the period after the Second World War, which nourished the illusion that capitalism, compelled to adjust to the new situation, had at last managed to become civilized.

The question of imperialism (and behind it the question of its opposite—liberation and development) has continued to weigh on the history of capitalism up to the present. Thus the victory of the liberation movements that just after the Second World War won the political independence of the Asian and African nations not only put an end to the system of colonialism but also, in a way, brought to a close the era of European

expansion that had opened in 1492. For four and a half centuries, from 1500 to 1950, that expansion had been the form taken by the development of historical capitalism, to the point where these two aspects of the same reality had become inseparable. To be sure, the "world system of 1492" had already been breached at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth by the independence of the Americas. But the breach was only apparent, because the independence in question had been won not by the indigenous peoples and the slaves imported by the colonists (except in Haiti) but by the colonists themselves, who thereby transformed America into a second Europe. The independence reconquered by the peoples of Asia and Africa took on a different meaning.

The ruling classes of the colonialist countries of Europe did not fail to understand that a new page of history had been turned. They realized that they had to give up the traditional view that the growth of their domestic capitalist economy was tied to the success of their imperial expansion. For that view was held not only by the old colonial powers—primarily England, France, and Holland—but also by the new capitalist centers formed in the nineteenth century—Germany, the United States, and Japan. Accordingly, the intra-European and international conflicts were primarily struggles over the colonies in the imperialist system of 1492. It being understood that the United States reserved to itself exclusive rights to the whole new continent.

The construction of a great European space—developed, rich, having a first-class technological and scientific potential, and strong military traditions—seemed to constitute a solid alternative on which to found a new resurgence of capitalist accumulation, without "colonies"—that is, on the basis of a new type of globalization, different from that of the system of 1492. The question remained how this new world system could differ from the old, if it would still be as polarizing as the old one, even if on a new basis, or if it would cease to be so.

No doubt this construction, which is not only far from finished but is going through a crisis that could call into question its long-term significance, will remain a difficult task. No formulas have yet been found that would make it possible to reconcile the historical realities of each nation, which weigh so heavily, with the formation of a politically united Europe. In addition, the vision of how this European economic and political space would fit into the new global system, which is also not yet constructed, has so far remained ambiguous, not to say foggy. Is this economic space to be the rival of the other great space, the one created in the second Europe by the United States? If so, how will this rivalry affect the relations of Europe and the United States with the rest of the world? Will the rivals confront each other like the imperialist powers of the earlier period? Or will they act in concert? In that case, will the Europeans choose to participate by proxy in this new version of the imperialist system of 1492, keeping their political choices in conformity with those of Washington? On what conditions could the construction of Europe become part of a globalization that would put a definitive end to the system of 1492?

Today we see the beginnings of a third wave of devastation of the world by imperialist expansion, encouraged by the collapse of the Soviet system and of the regimes of populist nationalism in the Third World. The objectives of dominant capital are still the same—the control of the expansion of markets, the looting of the earth's natural resources, the superexploitation of the labor reserves in the periphery—although they are being pursued in conditions that are new and in some respects very different from those that characterized the preceding phase of imperialism. The ideological discourse designed to secure the assent of the peoples of the central Triad (the United States, Western Europe, and Japan) has been refurbished and is now founded on a "duty to intervene" that is supposedly justified by the defense of "democracy," the "rights of peoples," and "humanitarianism." The examples of the double standard are so flagrant that it seems obvious to the Asians and Africans how cynically this language is used. Western opinion, however, has responded to it with as much enthusiasm as it did to the justifications of earlier phases of imperialism.

Furthermore, to this end the United States is carrying out a systematic strategy designed to ensure its absolute hegemony by a show of military might that will consolidate behind it all the other partners in the Triad. From this point of view, the war in Kosovo fulfilled a crucial function, witness the total capitulation of the European states, which supported the American position on the "new strategic concept" adopted by NATO immediately after the "victory" in Yugoslavia on April 23-25, 1999. In this "new concept" (referred to more bluntly on the other side of the Atlantic as the "Clinton Doctrine"), NATO's mission is, for practical purposes, extended to all of Asia and Africa (the United States, ever since the Monroe Doctrine, reserving the sole right to intervene in the Americas), an admission that NATO is not a defensive alliance but an offensive weapon of the United States. At the same time, this mission is redefined in terms as vague as one could wish that include new "threats" (international crime, "terrorism," the "dangerous" arming of countries outside NATO, etc.), which plainly makes it possible to justify almost any aggression useful to the United States. Clinton, moreover, made no bones about speaking of "rogue states" that might be necessary to attack "preventively," without further specifying what he means by the roguery in question. In addition, NATO is freed from the obligation of acting only on mandate from the UN, which is treated with a contempt equal to that which the fascist powers showed for the League of Nations (there is a striking similarity in the terms used).

American ideology is careful to package its merchandise, the imperialist project, in the ineffable language of the "historic mission of the United States." A tradition handed down from the beginning by the "founding fathers," sure of their divine inspiration. American liberals—in the political sense of the term, who consider themselves as the "left" in their society—share this ideology. Accordingly, they present American hegemony as necessarily "benign," the source of progress in moral scruples and in democratic practice, which will necessarily be to the advantage of those who, in their eyes, are not victims of this project but beneficiaries. American hegemony, universal

peace, democracy, and material progress are joined together as inseparable terms. Reality, of course, is located elsewhere.

The unbelievable extent to which public opinion in Europe (and particularly the opinion of the left, in places where it has the majority) has rallied around the project—public opinion in the United States is so naïve that it poses no problem—is a catastrophe that cannot but have tragic consequences. The intensive media campaigns, focused on the regions where Washington has decided to intervene, no doubt partly explain this widespread agreement. But beyond that, people in the West are persuaded that because the United States and the countries of the European Union are "democratic," their governments are incapable of "ill will," which is reserved for the bloody "dictators" of the East. They are so blinded by this conviction that they forget the decisive influence of the interests of dominant capital. Thus once again people in the imperialist countries give themselves a clear conscience.

Democracy is one of the absolute requirements for development. But we must still explain why, and on what conditions, because it is only recently that this idea has been, it seems, generally accepted. Not long ago the dominant dogma in the West, as in the East and the South, was that democracy was a "luxury" that could come only after "development" had solved the material problems of society. That was the official doctrine shared by the ruling circles of the capitalist world (by the United States to justify its support for the military dictators of Latin America, and the Europeans to justify theirs for the autocratic regimes of Africa); by the states of the Third World (where the Latin American theory of *desarrollismo* expressed it clearly); and by Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, and many other countries which proved that the socialist states were not the only ones governed by single parties; and by the rulers of the Soviet system.

But now, overnight, the proposition has been turned into its opposite. Everywhere, or almost everywhere, there is daily official talk about the concern for democracy; a certificate of democracy, awarded in due form, is a "condition" for seeking aid from the big, rich democracies; and so forth. The credibility of this rhetoric is particularly doubtful when the principle of the "double standard," which is applied with perfect cynicism, so plainly reveals in practice the real priority given to other, unacknowledged objectives, which the ruling circles attempt to achieve by pure and simple manipulation. This is not to deny that certain social movements, if not all, really do have democratic objectives, or that democracy really is the condition for development.

Democracy is a modern concept in the sense that it is the very definition of modernity—if, as I suggest, we understand by modernity the adoption of the principle that human beings individually and collectively (that is, societies) are responsible for their history. Before they could formulate that concept, people had to free themselves from the alienations characteristic of the forms of power that preceded capitalism, whether they were the alienations of religion or whether they took the form of "traditions" conceived

as permanent, transhistorical facts. The expressions of modernity, and of the necessity for democracy that it implies, date from the Age of Enlightenment. The modernity in question is therefore synonymous with capitalism, and the democracy that it has produced is limited like the rest, like capitalism itself. In its historical bourgeois forms—even though they are the only ones known and practiced so far—it constitutes only a "stage." Neither modernity nor democracy has reached the end of its potential development. That is why I prefer the term "democratization," which stresses the dynamic aspect of a still-unfinished process, to the term "democracy," which reinforces the illusion that we can give a definitive formula for it.

Bourgeois social thought has been based from the beginning, that is, since the Enlightenment, on a separation of the different domains of social life—among others, its economic management and its political management—and the adoption of different specific principles that are supposed to be the expression of the particular demands of "Reason" in each of these domains. According to this view, democracy is the reasonable principle of good political management. Since men (at the time, there was never any question of including women) or, more precisely, certain men (those who are sufficiently educated and well-to-do) are reasonable, they should have the responsibility of making the laws under which they wish to live and of choosing, by election, the persons who will be charged with executing those laws. Economic life, on the other hand, is managed by other principles that are likewise conceived as the expression of the demands of "Reason" (synonymous with human nature): private property, the right to be an entrepreneur, competition in markets. We recognize this group of principles as those of capitalism, which in and of themselves have nothing to do with the principles of democracy. This is the case especially if we think of democracy as implying equality—the equality of men and women, of course, but also of all human beings (bearing in mind that American democracy forgot its slaves until 1865 and the elementary civil rights of their descendants until 1960), of property owners and non-property owners (noting that private property exists only when it is exclusive, that is, if there are those who have none).

The separation of the economic and political domains immediately raises the question of the convergence or divergence of the results of the specific logics that govern them. In other words, should "democracy" (shorthand for modern management of political life) and "the market" (shorthand for capitalist management of economic activity) be viewed as convergent or divergent? The postulate on which the currently fashionable discourse rests, and which is elevated to the status of a truth so self-evident that there is no need to discuss it, affirms that the two terms converge. Democracy and the market supposedly engender each other, democracy requires the market and vice versa. Nothing could be further from the truth, as real history demonstrates.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment were more demanding than the common run of our contemporaries. Unlike the latter, they asked themselves why there was this convergence and on what conditions. Their answer to the first question was inspired by

their concept of “Reason,” the common denominator of the modes of management envisaged for democracy and market. If men are reasonable, then the results of their political choices can only reinforce the results produced by the market. This, then, on the condition, obviously, that the exercise of democratic rights is reserved to beings endowed with reason, which is to say certain men—not women, who, as we know, are guided only by their emotions and not by reason; nor, of course, slaves, the poor, and the dispossessed (the proletarians), who only obey their instincts. Democracy must be based on property qualifications and reserved to those who are simultaneously citizens and entrepreneurs. Naturally, then, it is probable that their electoral choices will always, or almost always, be consistent with their interests as capitalists. But that at once means that in its convergence with, not to say subordination to, economics, politics loses its autonomy. Economistic alienation functions here to the full, concealing this fact.

The later extension of democratic rights to others besides citizen entrepreneurs was not the spontaneous result of capitalist development or the expression of a requirement of that development. Quite the contrary, those rights were won gradually by the victims of the system—the working class and, later, women. They were the result of struggles against the system, even if the system managed to adapt to them, to “recuperate” their benefits, as the saying goes. How and at what cost? That is the real question that must be asked here.

This extension of rights necessarily reveals a contradiction expressed through the democratic vote between the will of the majority (those exploited by the system) and the fate that the market has in store for them, the system runs the risk of becoming unstable, even explosive. At a minimum there is the risk—and the possibility—that the market in question may have to submit to the expression of social interests that do not coincide with the maximum profitability of capital, to which the economic domain gives priority. In other words, there is the risk for some (capital) and the possibility for others (the worker-citizens) that the market may be regulated in terms other than the workings of its strict unilateral logic. That is possible; indeed, in certain conditions it has come to pass, as in the postwar welfare state.

But that is not the only possible way of concealing the divergence between democracy and the market. If concrete history produces circumstances such that the movement of social criticism becomes fragmented and impotent, and that consequently there appears to be no alternative to the dominant ideology, then democracy can be emptied of all content that gets in the way of the market and is potentially dangerous for it. You can vote freely any way you like: white, blue, green, pink, or red. Whatever you do, it will have no effect, because your fate is decided elsewhere, outside the precincts of parliament, in the market. The subordination of democracy to the market (and not their convergence) is reflected in the language of politics. The word “alternation” (changing the faces in power so as to go on doing the same thing) has replaced the word “alternative” (doing something else).

This alternation that applies only to the meaningless remnants left by market regulation is in fact a sign that democracy is in crisis. It erodes the credibility and legitimacy of democratic procedures and can readily lead to the replacement of democracy with an illusory consensus based, for example, on religion or ethnic chauvinism. From the beginning, the thesis that there is a "natural" convergence between democracy and the market contained the danger that we would come to this pass. It presupposes a society reconciled with itself, a society without conflict, as certain so-called postmodernist interpretations suggest. But the evidence is conclusive that global capitalist market relations have generated ever greater inequalities. Convergence theory—the notion that the market and democracy converge—is today pure dogma; a theory of imaginary politics. This theory is, in its own domain, the counterpart of "pure economics," which is the theory not of really existing capitalism but of an imaginary economy. Just as the dogma of market fundamentalism is everywhere wearing thin in the face of reality, we can no longer accept the popular notion propagated today that democracy converges with capitalism.

On the contrary, we become aware of the potential for authoritarianism latent in capitalism. Capitalism's response to the challenge presented by the dialectic of the individual vs. the collective (social) does indeed contain this dangerous potential.

The contradiction between the individual and the collective, which is inherent in every society at every level of its reality, was surmounted, in all the social systems before modern times, by the negation of its first term—that is, by the domestication of the individual by society. The individual is recognizable only by and through his status in the family, the clan, and society. In the ideology of the modern (capitalist) world, the terms of the negation are reversed: modernity declares itself in the rights of the individual, even in opposition to society. In my opinion, this reversal is only a precondition of liberation, the beginning of liberation. Because at the same time it liberates a potential for permanent aggressivity in the relations between individuals. Capitalist ideology expresses this reality by its ambiguous ethic: long live competition, let the strongest win. The devastating effects of this ideology are sometimes contained by the coexistence of other ethical principles, mostly of religious origin or inherited from earlier social forms. But let these dams give way, and the unilateral ideology of the rights of the individual—whether in the popularized versions of Sade or Nietsche, or in the American version—can only produce horror and, if pushed to its limits, autocracy—hard (fascist) or soft.

Marx underestimated this danger, I think. Perhaps out of concern not to encourage any illusions stemming from an addiction to the past, he may not have seen all the reactionary potential in the bourgeois ideology of the individual. Witness his preference for the American society, on the pretext that it did not suffer from the vestiges of a feudal past that handicapped progress in Europe. I want to suggest, on the contrary, that Europe's feudal past accounts for some of the relatively positive characteristics that argue in its favor. Should not the degree of violence that dominates daily life in the

United States, which is out of all proportion to what exists in Europe, be attributed precisely to the absence of premodern antecedents in the United States? To go even further, can we not ascribe to these antecedents—where they exist—a positive role in the emergence of elements of a post-capitalist ideology, emphasizing the values of generosity and human solidarity? Does not their absence reinforce submission to the dominating power of capitalist ideology? Is it mere chance that, precisely, "soft" authoritarianism (alternating with phases of hard authoritarianism, as the experience of McCarthyism should remind all those who have systematically erased it from their memory of recent history) is one of the permanent characteristics of the American model? Is it mere chance that for this reason the United States supplies the perfect model of low-intensity democracy, to the point where the proportion of people who abstain from voting is unheard of elsewhere and that—another fact that is not just accidental—it is precisely the disinherited who stay away from the polls *en masse*?

How will a dialectical synthesis, beyond capitalism, make it possible to reconcile the rights of the individual and those of the collectivity? How will this possible reconciliation give more transparency to individual life and the life of society? These are questions that we shall not attempt to answer here, but that definitely present themselves, indeed challenge the bourgeois concept of democracy and identify its historical limits.

If, then, there is no convergence, least of all a "natural" one, between the market and democracy, are we to conclude that development—understood in its usual sense of accelerated economic growth through an expansion of markets (and up to now there has hardly been any experience of development of a different kind)—is incompatible with the exercise of a rather advanced degree of democracy?

There is no lack of facts that would argue in favor of this thesis. The "successes" of Korea, of Taiwan, of Brazil under the military dictatorship, and of the nationalist populisms in their ascending phase (Nasser, Boumedienne, the Iraq of the Baath, etc.) were not achieved by systems that had any great respect for democracy. Further back, Germany and Japan, in the phase when they were catching up, were certainly less democratic than their British and French rivals. The modern socialist experiments, which were scarcely democratic, occasionally registered remarkable growth rates. But on the other side, one might observe that postwar democratic Italy modernized with a speed and to a depth that fascism, for all its bluster; never achieved, and that Western Europe, with its advanced social democracy (the postwar welfare state), experienced the most prodigious period of growth in history. One could strengthen the comparison in favor of democracy by enumerating countless dictatorships that engendered only stagnation, and even devastating masses of intertwined difficulties.

Could we then adopt a reserved, relativist position, refuse to establish any kind of relation between development and democracy, and say that whether they are compatible or not depends on specific concrete conditions? That attitude is acceptable so long as we are content with the "ordinary" definition of development, identifying it

with accelerated growth within the system. But it is no longer acceptable once we acknowledge the second of the three central propositions set forth at the beginning of this study. To wit: that globalized capitalism is by nature polarizing and that development is therefore a critical concept, which implies that development must take place within the framework of the construction of an alternative, post-capitalist society. That construction can only be the product of the progressive will and action of people. Is there a definition of democracy other than the one implicit in that will and that action? It is in this sense that democracy is truly the condition of development. But that is a proposition that no longer has anything to do with what the dominant discourse has to say on the subject. Our proposition comes down to saying in effect: there can be no socialism (if we use that term to designate a better, post-capitalist alternative) without democracy, but also there can be no progress in democratization without a socialist transformation.

The "realistic" observer who is lying in wait for me will lose no time in pointing out that the experience of really existing socialism argues against the validity of my thesis. True. The popular version of Soviet historical Marxism did decree that the abolition of private property meant straight away that it had been replaced by social property. Neither Marx nor Lenin had ever made so far-reaching a simplification. For them, the abolition of private ownership of capital and land was only the first necessary act initiating a possible long evolution toward the constitution of social ownership. Social ownership starts to become a reality only from the moment when democratization has made such powerful progress that the citizen-producers have become masters of all the decisions taken at all levels of social life, from the workplace to the summit of the state. The most optimistic of human beings could not imagine that this result might be achieved anywhere in the world—whether in the United States or France or the Congo—in "a few years," like the few years at the end of which it was proclaimed that in one place or another the construction of socialism had been completed. For the task is nothing less than to build a new culture, which requires successive generations gradually transforming themselves by their own action.

The reader will have quickly understood that there is an analogy, and not a contradiction, between 1) the functioning, in historical capitalism, of the relation between utopian liberalism and pragmatic management; and 2) the functioning, in the Soviet society, of the relation between socialist ideological discourse and real management. The socialist ideology in question is that of Bolshevism which, following that of European social democracy before 1914 (and making no break with it on this fundamental point), did not challenge the "natural" convergence of the logics of the different domains of social life and gave a "meaning" to history in a facile, linear interpretation of its "necessary" course. That was no doubt one way of reading historical Marxism, but it was not the only possible way of reading Marx (at any rate, it is not mine). The convergence is expressed here in the same way: seen from the point of view imposed by the dogma, the management of the economy by the Plan (substituted for

the market) obviously produces an appropriate response to the needs. Democracy can only reinforce the decisions of the Plan, and opposing these is irrational. But here too imaginary socialism runs up against the demands of the management of really existing socialism, which is confronted with real and serious problems, among others, for instance, developing the productive forces so as to "catch up." The powers-that-be provide for that by cynical practices that cannot be, and are not, acknowledged. Totalitarianism is common to both systems and expresses itself in the same way: by systematic lying. If its manifestations were, plainly, more violent in the USSR, it is because the backwardness that had to be overcome was such an extremely heavy burden, while the progress that had been made in the West gave its societies comfortable cushions on which to rest (hence its often "soft" totalitarianism, as in the consumerism of the periods of easy growth).

Abandoning the thesis of convergence and accepting the conflict between the logics of different domains is the prerequisite for interpreting history in a way that potentially reconciles theory and reality. But it is also the prerequisite for devising strategies that will make it possible to take really effective action—that is, to make progress in every aspect of society.

The intimate relation between real social development and democratization, so close that the two are inseparable, has nothing to do with the chatter on the subject offered by the proponents of the dominant ideology. Their thinking is always second-rate, confusing, ambiguous, and in the end, despite what may sometimes appear, reactionary. As a consequence, it has become the perfect tool of the dominant power of capital.

Democracy is necessarily a universalist concept, and it can tolerate no lapse from that essential virtue. But the dominant discourse —even the one that emanates from forces that subjectively classify themselves as "on the left"—gives a sliced-up interpretation of democracy that in the end negates the unity of the human race in favor of "races," "communities," "cultural groups," etc. Anglo-Saxon identity politics, the aggregate expression of which is "communitarianism," is a blatant example of this negation of the real equality of human beings. To wish naively, even with the best of intentions, for specific forms of "community development"—which, it will be claimed afterwards, were produced by the democratically expressed will of the communities in question (the West Indians in the London suburbs, for example, or the North Africans in France, or the Blacks in the United States, etc.)—is to lock individuals inside these communities and to lock these communities inside the iron limits of the hierarchies that the system imposes. It is nothing less than a kind of apartheid that is not acknowledged as such.

The argument advanced by the promoters of this model of "community development" appears to be both pragmatic ("do something for the dispossessed and the victims, who are gathered together in these communities") and democratic ("the communities are eager to assert themselves as such"). No doubt a lot of universalist talk has been and

still is pure rhetoric, calling for no strategy for effective action to change the world, which would obviously mean considering concrete forms of struggle against the oppression suffered by this or that particular group. Agreed. But the oppression in question cannot be abolished if at the same time we give it a framework within which it can reproduce itself, even if in a milder form.

The attachment that members of an oppressed community may feel for their own culture of oppression, much as we may respect the feeling in the abstract, is nevertheless the product of the crisis of democracy. It is because the effectiveness, the credibility, and the legitimacy of democracy have eroded that human beings take refuge in the illusion of a particular identity that could protect them. Then we find on the agenda culturalism, that is, the assertion that each of these communities (religious, ethnic, sexual, or other) has its own irreducible values (that is, values that have no universal significance). Culturalism, as I have said elsewhere, is not a complement to democracy, a means of applying it concretely, but on the contrary a contradiction to it.

The scenarios for the future remain largely dependent on one's vision of the relations between the strong objective tendencies and the responses that the peoples, and the social forces of which they are composed, make to the challenges those tendencies represent. So there is an element of subjectivity, of intuition, that cannot be eliminated. And that, by the way, is a very good thing, because it means that the future is not programmed in advance and that the product of the inventive imagination, to use Castoriadis's strong expression, has its place in real history.

It is especially hard to make predictions in a period like ours, when all the ideological and political mechanisms that governed the behavior of the various actors have disappeared. When the post-Second World War period came to an end, the structure of political life collapsed. Political life and political struggles had traditionally been conducted in the context of political states, whose legitimacy was not questioned (the legitimacy of a government could be questioned, but not that of the state). Behind and within the state, political parties, unions, a few great institutions—like national associations of employers and the circles that the media call the "political class"—constituted the basic structure of the system within which political movements, social struggles, and ideological currents expressed themselves. But now we find that almost everywhere in the world these institutions have to one degree or another lost a good part, if not all, of their legitimacy. People "don't believe in them any more." Thus, in their place "movements" of various kinds have pushed to the fore, movements centered around the demands of the Greens, or of women, movements for democracy or social justice, and movements of groups asserting their identity as ethnic or religious communities. This new political life is therefore highly unstable. It would be worth discussing concretely the relation between these demands and movements and the radical critique of society (that is, of really existing capitalism) and globalized neoliberal management. Because some of these movements join—or could join—in the conscious rejection of the society projected by the dominant powers; others on the contrary, take

no interest in it and do nothing to oppose it. The dominant powers are able to make this distinction, and they make it. Some movements they manipulate and support, openly or covertly; others they resolutely combat—that is the rule in this new and unsettled political life.

There is a global political strategy for world management. The objective of this strategy is to bring about the greatest possible fragmentation of the forces potentially hostile to the system by fostering the breakup of the state forms of organization of society. As many Slovenias, Chechnyas, Kosovos, and Kuwaits as possible! In this connection, the opportunity of using, even manipulating, demands based on separate identity is welcome. The question of community identity—ethnic, religious, or other—is therefore one of the central questions of our time.

The basic democratic principle, which implies real respect for diversity (national, ethnic, religious, cultural, ideological), can tolerate no breach. The only way to manage diversity is by practicing genuine democracy. Failing that, it inevitably becomes an instrument that the adversary can use for his (less often her) own ends. But in this respect the various lefts in history have often been lacking. Not always, of course, and much less so than is frequently said today. One example among others: Tito's Yugoslavia was almost a model of coexistence of nationalities on a really equal footing; but certainly not Romania! In the Third World of the Bandung period the national liberation movements often managed to unite different ethnic groups and religious communities against the imperialist enemy. Many ruling classes in the first generation of African states were really transethnic. But very few powers were able to manage diversity democratically, or, when gains were made, to maintain them. Their weak inclination for democracy gave results as deplorable in this domain as in the management of the other problems of their societies. When the crisis came, the hard-pressed ruling classes, powerless to confront it, often played a decisive role in a particular ethnic community's recourse to withdrawal, which was used as a means of prolonging their "control" of the masses. Even in many authentic bourgeois democracies, however, community diversity is far from having always been managed correctly. Northern Ireland is the most striking example.

Culturalism has been successful to the degree that democratic management of diversity has failed. By culturalism I mean the affirmation that the differences in question are "primordial," that they should be given "priority" (over class differences, for example), and sometimes even that they are "transhistorical," that is, based on historical invariables. (This last is often the case with religious culturalisms, which easily slide toward obscurantism and fanaticism.)

To sort out this tangle of demands based on identity, I would propose what I think is an essential criterion. Those movements whose demands are connected with the fight against social exploitation and for greater democracy in every domain are progressive. On the contrary, those that present themselves as having "no social program" (because

that is supposed to be unimportant!) and as being "not hostile to globalization" (because that too is unimportant!)—*a fortiori*, those that declare themselves foreign to the concept of democracy (which is accused of being a "Western" notion)—are openly reactionary and serve the ends of dominant capital to perfection. Dominant capital knows this, by the way, and supports their demands (even when the media take advantage of their barbarous content to denounce the peoples who are its victims!), using, and sometimes manipulating, these movements.

Democracy and the rights of peoples, which the same representatives of dominant capital invoke today, are hardly conceived to be more than the political means of neoliberal management of the contemporary world crisis, complementing the economic means. The democracy in question depends on cases. The same is true of the "good governance" they talk about. In addition, because it is entirely subservient to the priorities that the strategy of the United States/Triad tries to impose, it is cynically used as a tool. Hence the systematic application of the double standard. No question of intervening in favor of democracy in Afghanistan or the countries of the Persian Gulf, for example, any more than of getting in the way of Mobutu yesterday, of Savimbi today, or of many others tomorrow. The rights of peoples are sacred in certain cases (today in Kosovo, tomorrow perhaps in Tibet), forgotten in others (Palestine, Turkish Kurdistan, Cyprus, the Serbs of Krajina whom the Croatian regime has expelled by armed force, etc.). Even the terrible genocide in Rwanda occasioned no serious inquiry into the share of responsibility of the states that gave diplomatic support to the governments that were openly preparing it. No doubt the abominable behavior of certain regimes facilitates the task by providing pretexts that are easy to exploit. But the complicitous silence in other cases takes away all credibility from the talk of democracy and the rights of peoples. One could not do less to meet the fundamental requirements of the struggle for democracy and respect for peoples, without which there can be no progress.

That being (fortunately) the case, in the new phase we are already witnessing the rise of struggles involving the working people who are victims of the system. Landless peasants in Brazil; wage earners and unemployed, in solidarity, in some European countries; unions that include the great majority of wage earners (as in Korea or South Africa); young people and students carrying along with them the urban working classes (as in Indonesia)—the list grows longer every day. These social struggles are bound to expand. They will surely be very pluralistic, which is one of the positive characteristics of our time. No doubt this pluralism stems from the accumulated results of what has sometimes been called the "new social movements"—women's movements, ecological movements, democratic movements. They will, of course, have to confront different obstacles to their development, depending on time and place.

The central question here is what the relation will be between the overriding conflicts, by which I mean the global conflicts between the various dominant classes—that is, the states—whose possible geometry I have tried to outline above. Which will carry the day?

Will the social struggles be subordinated, contained within the larger global-imperialist context of the conflicts, and therefore mastered by the dominant powers, even mobilized for their purposes, if not always manipulated? Or, on the contrary, will the social struggles win their autonomy and force the powers to adapt to their demands?

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