

Samir Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition from Capitalism to Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016).

Amin argues that “capitalism cannot continue indefinitely as permanent accumulation and the exponential growth it entails will end up in certain death for humanity.” Globalized capitalism “is ripe to be overtaken by another form of civilization, one more advanced and necessary”. There is no inevitability to the apocalyptic end, but neither is there any necessity for a progressive transition to socialism. Socialism is a potential, so the question is, how might this transition occur, where, and when? In his view, ripeness requires capital accumulation to have reached a point at which people’s “capacities for action” have been “enabled” and they have become culturally and ethically mature.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, where capital accumulation has proceeded the furthest, in the globalized centres, there is very little evidence of enabling or of cultural and ethical maturity. Radical potential would still appear deeper in the peripheralized South (which Amin acknowledges: Latin America and the “Arab Spring”).

The principal problem is that Amin does not pay sufficient attention to the conditions necessary for the development of the subjective factors necessary for socialist transition. Like the transition to capitalism, which Amin said required a conscious ideology, the transition to socialism requires a different consciousness. The above phrase, however, is as close as Amin gets to discussing the conditions for creating such a radical consciousness. Implicitly at this stage of his argument, then, Amin has adopted what Lenin referred to as “spontaneity” and rejected the need for centralized organization.

The essays Amin has collected for this volume, which were written between 1990 and 2015, range widely over time and space, and have been re-written in part in an exercise of clarification. He argues that any Marxist analysis must take both of these dimensions into account. Whereas historical Marxism and the Leninist theory subordinate geography to history, and “know only class struggle”, in world systems theory class struggle is virtually eliminated “because it is incapable of changing the course imposed on it by the evolution of the system as a whole.”<sup>2</sup> Amin proposes to combine both approaches by analyzing “the dynamics of the local transformations” in the context of social struggles, and the articulation of these regional dynamics relative to the world system.<sup>3</sup> He focuses on the emergence and future of the center-periphery contradiction in globalized capitalism, the history of the Soviet and (more briefly) Chinese experiences in building a socialist alternative, and then advances some policy requirements of a contemporary socialist movement that is required but is, at best, embryonic.

### The World System: Center/Periphery

At all its stages, globalized capitalism “can only produce, reproduce, and deepen the center/periphery contrast. The capitalist path is an impasse for 80% of humanity.”<sup>4</sup> The old center/periphery system was based on a set of national production economies linked in a hierarchal world system. Since about 1980, the new globalized production system has dismantled this national production system. Oligopolistic companies in the US, Europe, and Japan (the triad

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<sup>1</sup> Samir Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition from Capitalism to Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016), 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 7-9.

<sup>3</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 39.

of collective imperialism) have progressively reduced production activities in other countries to the level of subcontractors, providing the triad with a significantly greater share of surplus value.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, in places where nationalized systems of production had made some independent progress in the 1960s and 70s, globalization undermined this process in favour of subcontractual roles, resulting in “a re-compradorization” affecting Eastern Europe, the remnants of the USSR, and also the pockets of national development that had been initiated in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this “collective imperialism”, no overall globalized system exists because of an absence of a global bourgeoisie and a global state.<sup>7</sup> There is no necessity for political centralization to follow economic, and each bloc in the triad is still the focus of separate bourgeoisies. It remains a chaotic system which, Amin declares, “is not viable.” Furthermore, there is no globalized bourgeoisie, and no global state “on the horizon.” What there is on the horizon is potential conflicts between “societies” (not simply political states or ruling classes) and therefore “potential conflict between [/] states.” Amin does not explain what he means by conflict between societies, nor does he differentiate this idea (if he does) from the “clash of civilizations” argument. National states remain significant even with the spread of neoliberalism, which still requires activist states, and because the need to defend external interests make it an military state.<sup>8</sup>

Within globalized capitalism, the Bandung era (mid-1950s to mid-1970s) stands out as a period of popular anti-imperialism, which led to attempts to de-link societies from global capitalism. Amin says this strategy had been debated before the Bandung Conference of 1955 in the communist parties of Asia and the Middle East, where it was a “radical left-wing critique” of the Zhdanov report (peaceful coexistence between the capitalist and socialist blocs). The key question was whether this anti-imperialist and later non-aligned movement was to be directed by a national bourgeoisie (with communist support) or by “a front of popular classes, directed by the communists”.<sup>9</sup> The latter, he says, was the policy of both Stalin and Mao (new democracy, in the case of Mao) – the bourgeoisie of the peripheries was understood as not nationalist. However, Stalin had pushed the CCP into a subordinate role in support of the supposedly nationalist Kuomintang, although after the success of the Revolution Stalin may have favoured a ‘new democracy’ period which, I suspect, would have included an important role for the “national bourgeoisie” in China as part of the popular forces. Bandung and the non-aligned movement, then, sought significant elements of both economic delinking and autonomous development.<sup>10</sup>

Despite authoritarian tendencies, Bandung-era states in the South (e.g., Egypt and the Arab Socialist Baath party in Syria and Iraq) were nationalist-populist [/] having “some popular legitimacy” because their achievements benefitted workers and because of “their anti-imperialist positions.” The dictatorships that followed the Bandung-type projects adopted neo-liberal, lumpenddevelopment policies and lost this legitimacy.<sup>11</sup> In Amin’s view, anti-imperialism and delinking are essential elements of a socialist project then and now: “the fight against imperialism brings together, at the world level, the social and political forces whose victories are

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<sup>5</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 36-7.

<sup>9</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 73.

<sup>10</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 74.

<sup>11</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 121-2.

decisive in opening the way to possible socialist advances in the contemporary world.”<sup>12</sup> In this formulation, he seems to distinguish between forces that are progressive in specific conjunctures and socialist advances, for which the former are preliminary and create the preconditions.

After Bandung and the recolonization of the peripheries, a national bourgeoisie proved not everywhere moribund, and certain countries in the South presented themselves as “emerging”, but in what way? Were they only markets open to Western capitalist expansion, “Or emerging nations capable of imposing a genuine revision of the terms of globalization”, thereby reducing the power of the imperialists “while reconducting the accumulation to their own national development?” Only China, he believes, has with some success taken the latter road, but “The question of the social content of the powers in place in the emerging countries ... and the prospects that this opens up or closes is once again on the agenda.” Amin believes that “a second awakening of the south is on the horizon” (Bandung being the first). But Bandung failed in part because it lacked support, he says; that is, there was no convergence between the struggles in the South and North.<sup>13</sup> Presumably now, any national development consequent on delinking in the South can be successful only with “convergence” with struggles in the North. This conclusion is actually pessimistic. The examples of Arab Springs and Bolivarian Revolutions do suggest that these movements are prey to re-peripherization. While Amin does not speculate about what political conditions might be necessary for stabilization (his term) of these movements, his general argument suggests the need for anti-imperialist policies and greater democratization, but what the latter entails in practice is not clear.

## The USSR and China

Amin turns to the central question of the book about why the “long transition from capitalism to socialism” occurred first in less likely places, Russia and China (and elsewhere), and why socialism (of some form) was not consolidated in these societies. In contrast to Lenin’s “weak link” theory, Amin says that neither Russia nor China were peripheral societies within world capitalism; that is, they were either not directly colonized (Russia) or less colonized (China) by the West. Lenin’s argument was that Russia was subject to the “higher stage of imperialism” of finance capital, which created a small but significant industrial sector in Russia and a potentially class-conscious proletariat in the midst of a semi-feudal autocracy. Revolution was immanent in Russia, but the bourgeoisie was insufficiently strong to lead the country to independence, making a proletarian-led revolution both likely and necessary. In “less colonized” China, the Revolution succeeded in the context of the violent imperialism of Japan. Amin argues that Russia under the Tsars was, instead, a “backward center” of economic and political power, which, he says, “explains the violence of the social conflicts that took place,”<sup>14</sup> a simplified and inaccurate assessment of the struggles for socialism and against imperialist aggression in Russia.

Amin says the natural tendency of capitalist expansion is “to homogenize the world” – although he does not mean that the center/periphery distinction is temporary and would be erased given enough time. At the same time, development is “necessarily unequal” (the opposite of homogenizing) and is an immanent result of capitalism’s expansion. So unequal development is

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<sup>12</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 17-18.

not due to “particular historical circumstances ... but to the immanent results of this very expansion.”<sup>15</sup> Marx failed to understand this tendency of capitalist expansion.

Second, Amin says, the received model of socialist transition (basically the Leninist theory) assumed that “the new mode of production (socialism) does not develop within the old capitalist one, but beside it, in the countries that have broken with capitalism.”<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the bourgeoisie grew within feudal societies, rent by the struggles of peasants and aristocracies. It might appear to follow from this argument that both Russia and China experienced premature revolutions, and that the old theory that socialism can develop only within fully developed, central capitalism is still intact. Amin does not make this claim. And he does not repudiate any of the socialist revolutions of the twentieth century, despite their failure to stabilize a socialist mode of production. Nor does he conclude that such a “stabilization” was impossible. There were flaws in the theory derived from Lenin that, perhaps, made failure more likely but not necessary, because there were alternatives at every juncture of these revolutions.

The Russian Empire in the center and east was constructed first militarily, but in terms of social change, the old exploiting relationships were maintained within the framework of the Empire.<sup>17</sup> Expansion to the Baltics similarly left the local landowning elite in place. Presumably, Tsarist Russia was a tribute empire. The USSR inherited much of this space. In its national policy, the USSR “created distinct republics” along linguistic, ethnic, and religious lines and, to combat Russian chauvinism, assigned the republics territories beyond the boundaries of any specific ethnic or linguistic group.<sup>18</sup> The republics were given cultural autonomy, but national independence was not envisioned by the Communist Party. The conquest of the Caucasus regions and central Asia were similar and, despite “brutal autocratic administration ... and Russian arrogance”, the conquest was not as brutal as capitalist expansion elsewhere (Ireland, the Americas, etc.). In fact, Amin argues “The Soviet system brought changes for the better” by allowing for cultural and linguistic autonomy and by “transferring capital” from the rich to the poor regions.<sup>19</sup>

Considering the early economic development of the USSR, Amin essentially endorses Bukharin’s position that the correct policy was to continue the NEP and move slowly towards socialism, although there were class contradictions in this policy, which he doesn’t discuss.<sup>20</sup> In Amin’s view, when the cold war began in 1920 with the Western objective of counter-revolution, Lenin and then Stalin tried to pursue a policy of peaceful coexistence, but the West first pushed Germany to attack the USSR and then created NATO as an offensive weapon. The need to defend against the military might of Germany and the West “implied rapid industrialization” in the USSR which, in turn, threatening and then undermined the worker-peasant alliance.<sup>21</sup> “Collectivization was the price of that choice.” Only later was it realized, Amin says, that modernized family farms were more efficient than large collectivized ones. Amin argues that this choice was “the origin of the abandonment of revolutionary democracy and the autocratic turn.”<sup>22</sup> In short, collectivization broke the worker-peasant alliance and reinforced “the state’s autocratic apparatus” opening the way to a new bourgeois class. “Because of some of its own

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<sup>15</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 26-7.

<sup>18</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 70-1.

<sup>22</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 77.

historical limitations, Leninism had unwittingly prepared the groundwork for this fatal choice". Specifically, it had not broken radically with economism, for example, in its assumption of "the social neutrality of technology".<sup>23</sup>

China correctly criticized developments in Russia, first in veiled terms in 1957 and then openly in 1964 in the "Letter in Twenty-Five Points".<sup>24</sup> Amin says that after 1957 he neither considered the USSR socialist nor a socialism "deformed by bureaucracy" (Trotsky's term). He regarded "the ruling exploiting class ... as a bourgeoisie" originating in the *nomenclatura*. "[T]he Party was a long mouldering corpse that had become an instrument of social control over the masses exercised by the exploiting ruling class." The Party exercised control through the secret police and kept the people in a client status through the distribution of social benefits. African socialism presented a similar situation. [/] The result of such clintelism in all cases is fragmentation and depoliticization.<sup>25</sup>

The USSR was not socialist, but, positively, what was it? Socialism, in addition to abolition of private property, Amin says, "has a positive meaning of alternative labor relations other than those defining wage status and [/] alternative social relations allowing society as a whole (and not an apparatus functioning on its behalf) to control its social future." It is a more advanced democracy.<sup>26</sup> Amin constructs a dichotomy between "society as a whole", which is expected to control its own future, and an "apparatus functioning on its behalf" without using the term substitutionism. He dismisses the need for a party "apparatus" and organization, and he talks a great deal about democracy but doesn't describe its content.

The USSR ruling class was "bourgeois", he says, but the USSR was not capitalist because of the maintenance of state centralization, meaning that the economy operated under a different logic of accumulation to that of capitalist competition. He characterizes it simply as the Soviet mode of production.<sup>27</sup> Amin had once thought, he said, that the USSR represented "a new and stable mode" of production" foreshadowing the future of other capitalist societies, as monopoly gave way to state monopoly. He believed that a parallel evolution was underway in, for example, Sweden and in the Eurocommunist parties. This state form was the highest form of capitalism and, presumably, represented the interests of the new class. The USSR, however, proved unstable, and neoliberalism soon dominated over state capitalism.<sup>28</sup>

At best, then, Amin says the USSR represented "primitive socialism", and he believes that the transition to it had been "national and popular" rather than, presumably, genuinely socialist. National implied delinking from imperialism; popular referred to the "popular bloc", which was neither bourgeois nor proletarian. The long transition of these "primitive socialist" societies may lead to capitalism or "somewhere else".<sup>29</sup> The key to the failure to build socialism in the USSR was the depoliticization of the masses; the key to the future is the extent to which Russian capitalism is peripheralized.<sup>30</sup>

The dissolution of the USSR was a choice made by the ruling classes of the Republics. The Russian ruling class wanted to be free of the economic burden of the poor republics. Yeltsin and Gorbachev wanted to bring in capitalism immediately as a form of "shock therapy". The

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<sup>23</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 44-5.

<sup>26</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 45-6.

<sup>27</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 46.

<sup>28</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 50-1.

<sup>29</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 52.

<sup>30</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 53.

ruling classes in Ukraine and Russia wanted to control their own national territories and “seized both absolute political power and [/] major assets from the large industrial complexes of the Soviet economy, which were privatized in haste for their exclusive benefit.” But, Amin says, “The Soviet system had been rotten for at least two decades”; that is, back to 1970 or so. The cause, he says, originated with Brezhnev who abandoned the “revolutionary democracy of 1917 in favor of an autocratic management by the new Soviet state capitalism”.<sup>31</sup> It is likely, however, that the cause has deeper roots (as Amin acknowledges elsewhere). The events in post-1989 Russia were not a counter-revolution but merely the “acceleration of underlying trends that were already in existence within the Soviet system in the 1930s”.<sup>32</sup>

While Khrushchev criticized Stalinism from the right, Mao did so from the left with the idea of putting politics in command, which, he suggests, had some potential for furthering socialism. For Amin, however, Mao intended to “challenge the monopoly of the Communist Party” (“Bombard the headquarters!”) He makes of Mao a social democrat. Rather, Mao never abandoned the conception of the Party. His objective was to rectify it from within and, when that failed, to attempt a rectification from without.

China had learned from Russian experience. The revolution was “popular democratic”, which required maintaining the worker-peasant alliance. Mao “renovated small family farms” without granting private ownership, bringing about food sovereignty as well as national industrial development.<sup>33</sup> In both the Russian and Chinese cases, Amin distinguishes between Thermidor and restoration, and debates when the former occurred, tracing its origins back in the past in both countries and not singling out a specific time. In his view, restoration occurred in France only with the coronation of Louis XVIII, and in Russia it occurred only with Gorbachev and Yeltsin, but not earlier in 1989-91. But, he says, there has yet been no restoration in China.<sup>34</sup>

Amin reiterates his argument that stabilizing socialist development requires making concessions to the market and that the NEP should have gone further in that direction, but certainly not as far as in Yugoslavia. But concessions should not have taken the actual direction pursued in the USSR of giving “more power to directors of enterprises, [and] more competition among enterprises”. Both of these policies can be traced back to Stalin and, reasonably, back to Lenin’s endorsement of capitalist management techniques as neutral. Furthermore, Amin says, whatever concessions were made to the market, they “had to be accompanied by political democratization. The genuine powers of the workers had to be strengthened in this democracy against those of the bourgeois technocrats. The market had to be incorporated into a state policy based on the law of value of the transition to socialism.”<sup>35</sup>

The Soviet collapse of 1989-1991 was largely inevitable, but the direction of change, Amin believes, was not. Amin had earlier stated that there was a bourgeois class in Russia, and he had quoted Mao approvingly that the bourgeoisie wants one thing: capitalism. He states that “It was always possible that the Soviet regime might fall to the right (as happened) or evolve (or fall) to the left. The latter possibility has been ruled out [/] for the immediate future but remains on the agenda of history” since the right-wing solution will not stabilize these societies. The question is, what does Amin mean by ‘left’? The Soviet mode of production, as he had described the existing system, was no longer viable. In the era of Gorbachev, Amin suggests, the

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<sup>31</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 30-31.

<sup>32</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 128.

<sup>33</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 78-9.

<sup>34</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 49.

contradictions entailed in moving from extensive to intensive accumulation (which had not developed), and of autocracy versus democracy, “might have found a solution in an evolution toward the ‘center-left’” that would have entailed opening specific market spaces and allowing greater democratization “without challenging the dominant forms of collective property”.<sup>36</sup> Amin never explores what he means in any concrete way by “democratization”. Clearly, this “center-left” option did not happen, and it did not precisely because the emerging bourgeois class wanted immediate privatization of collective property for personal enrichment (as Amin acknowledges). Amin never asks what social forces might have been behind a move to this ‘center-left’ which may have existed in theory (the Russian working class) but not in practice, or subjectively. And he never addresses the question of what kind of leadership would be necessary for socialism to persist in the Soviet Union in this “reformed” direction.

Amin argues that the center-left option remains a potential in Russia: “There is no doubt that serious alternative views derived from a criticism of Sovietism from the left, who aim to forge ahead with socialist reconstruction, would find favorable terrain in Russia. . . . Up till now these visions have not moved out of left intellectual circles and have no hold on the people.”<sup>37</sup> Presumably, they reflect a social-democratic potential within the formalities of Russian bourgeois democracy. What Amin envisages nationally is a mixed economy (that is, recollectivization of significant private assets), collective bargaining, and participative representative democracy: the kind of social democracy that has been abandoned by Western liberal parties that had social democratic origins. In this Eastern social democracy, should it come about, international economic relations would be based on a recognition of the inequality of the partners and diversity of their interests, and recognition of the sovereignty of the people. The result would be the beginning of “an initial stage” on the long road to socialism.<sup>38</sup>

Any kind of left-wing or progressive movement in the East must entail the delinking Amin had discussed in terms of a new model of globalization. Europe and America want to force dependency status on Russia; hence their support for the “Euro-fascist coup d’etat in Kiev.” The dominant imperialist powers are forced to coexist with enemies, such as China, which “has rejected (until now) the neocomprador option and is pursuing its sovereign project of integrated and coherent national development.”<sup>39</sup> So, Amin speculates, Putin might “break with economic neoliberalism to embark on . . . an authentic project of economic and social renaissance” similar to the path being followed by China.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the Soviet bourgeoisie should see a centralized state, with some economic powers over private capital, as better than the present drift (or stampede) towards peripheralization. This argument, in turn, hinges on the strength of a national bourgeoisie in Russia and on a crisis that makes the formal shell of multi-party bourgeois democracy a harmful burden.

In the interests of making Russia a center rather than a periphery of Europe and the US, Putin should abandon neoliberalism, Amin says, and escape from financial globalization. “There are still today segments of the political class in Russia that are disposed to support a state capitalism that would, in turn, be open to the possibility of moving in the direction of a democratic and socialized management.” They are opposed by the comprador fraction,

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<sup>36</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 86.

<sup>37</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 101.

<sup>39</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 31.

benefitting from the spoils of the USSR and neo-liberalism.<sup>41</sup> Putin, however, remains wedded to the global financialized market and to the management, economically and politically, of local oligarchies. [/] For “a project of sovereign development” he must diminish this “economic and social management” as must all emerging countries “except maybe, and up to a certain point, China.”<sup>42</sup> It is not that Putin is somehow above class; presumably he would need to orchestrate a popular, anti-imperialist movement uniting the working classes and the national bourgeoisie (in fact, under the national bourgeoisie). Concretely, such a political force – whether organized by Putin or some other ‘left’ force – would depend on the relative strength of the national and comprador capitalist fractions as well as the working classes. In the case of Putin, it is more likely that such a solution would entail a turn to proto-fascist tendencies than an opening to wider proto-socialist alternatives.

Amin lays out his ideal plan on pp. 101-102 of an alternative globalization based on the principles of diversity and popular sovereignty. Yevgeny Primakov, he says, imagined something along these lines.<sup>43</sup> (Primakov was briefly Prime Minister in the late 1990s under Yeltsin, opposed American imperialism, and was a popular figure in Russia.) Amin sees hope in Russia in “the intensification of social struggles and democratic demands, the dissipation of illusions, and the beginning of the reconstruction of new and open left [/] forces that are able to convince the working classes” that the communist parties, and presumably the bourgeois class, have only their own short term interests in mind.<sup>44</sup> In terms of uniting with struggles in the West, the likelihood is not propitious: “the predominant left in Europe is complicit with dominant imperialism.”<sup>45</sup>

Amin’s discussion of the realignment of global alliances (Europe-Russia, or Russia, China, India) need have nothing at all to do with socialism; they are alternative realignments of capitalist and at least potentially collective imperialist powers, and not necessarily anything more. Realignment can be accomplished without his notion of an alternative globalization, as described above, although any such move would disrupt the present form of collective imperialism (the triad) and therefore, he would argue, potentially “open space” for more progressive options.

## The Long Transition from Capitalism to Socialism

So we are still in the era of the long transition from capitalism to socialism, indicated by the conflict “between the trends and forces of the reproduction of capitalistic relations and the (anti-systemic) trends and forces, [/] whose logic has other aspirations—those, precisely, that can be defined as socialism.” “[T]he immediate step is to deal with the challenge that confronts us all: building up a multipolar world that makes possible the maximum development of anti-systemic forces.” Amin questions whether Russia and China are in the best position to accomplish this task.<sup>46</sup> Russia and China opened the “long transition, the outcome of which is unknown.” Their development, as noted above, may be towards central or peripheral capitalism, and “it may

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<sup>41</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 128.

<sup>42</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 133-4.

<sup>43</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 103.

<sup>44</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 103-4.

<sup>45</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 105.

<sup>46</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 18-19.

encourage progress towards socialism. What is important is to analyze the objective direction of the advance towards socialism.”<sup>47</sup>

For Amin, Socialism I of the nineteenth century died in 1914. “Socialism II, of the Third International and Leninism, is now dead after a long illness.” Socialism III “requires a rupture with Sovietism as radical as that made by Lenin in 1914”. This rupture must entail the development of productive forces (but not the unrestricted and ecologically disastrous growth characteristic of capitalism and Socialism II), and it must build “a society free of economic alienation.” By alienation Amin means reducing the human being to mere labor power and regarding nature “as the inexhaustible object of human exploitation.”<sup>48</sup> Lenin’s economism was the seed that led to the domination of productive forces over any alternative form of socialist development.<sup>49</sup> Socialism III is to come, Amin says, but its outlines are visible. He lists three lessons:

1. “Creating an alternative must come before catching up, at all costs.” [/]
2. “delinking is the only choice” even if it is constrained.
3. “Systematic action must be taken to rebuild a polycentric world, thus providing scope for the people’s autonomous progress.”<sup>50</sup>

Amin has in mind a new internationalism of all peoples offering “a prospect, albeit a distant one, of a socialism that can only be worldwide and able to meet the challenge of globalization.”<sup>51</sup> The question of de-linking is paradoxical, but in this context it likely refers to de-linking from US-led imperialism while forging new, multi-national linkages. He does not mean the previous alternative of an entirely national kind of autonomous development, although sovereign societies must advance their own particular interests (in the world he envisions of respect for diversity and equalization). The contradiction of developing a world-wide movement in the context of still national societies and states is not addressed.

In referring to this long transition, Amin does not distinguish between reform and revolution, which he says is simply “scholastic”. The transition from feudalism to capitalism was both, and it required “a certain ideological consciousness”. (The passage to feudalism, on the other hand, had been anarchic and decadent.)<sup>52</sup> Socialism III requires breaking up of the centralized system of capitalist accumulation; that is, the “capitalist centralization of surplus”. That is the essential element of delinking. Humankind can control this slow transition, potentially, “through the renaissance of a serious worldwide movement of Socialism III.” The options are, as Luxemburg had said, barbarism or socialism.<sup>53</sup>

Barbarism is represented in the present by a resurgence of fascism. “Fascism is not synonymous with an authoritarian police regime that rejects the uncertainties of parliamentary electoral democracy. Fascism is a particular political response to the challenges with which the management of capitalist society may be confronted in specific circumstances.” Amin lists eight European fascist societies up to 1945 (including France under Pétain). They represented “a

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<sup>47</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 47.

<sup>48</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 47.

<sup>49</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 48.

<sup>50</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 65-66.

<sup>51</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 66.

<sup>52</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 66.

<sup>53</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 67.

diversity of structures and conjunctures” preventing them from being lumped together.<sup>54</sup> The key to the resort to fascism is an existing crisis and the decision to adopt the fascist solution to managing monopoly capitalism. They are “not political forms that challenge capitalism’s legitimacy”. Second, fascism categorically rejects democracy. It demands submission of “collective discipline” and returns to predominance “backward-looking ideas”, amounting to a “reversal of values”.<sup>55</sup> Fascism has returned in several forms to the globalized West, East, and South, e.g., in the Islamist states and in India (the BJP).<sup>56</sup> The South American dictatorships are “parafascist”.<sup>57</sup>

In Europe, fascism is at the moment unnecessary through the collusion between the parliamentary right and the “social liberals”, using the term to denote the former social democratic parties.<sup>58</sup> People seeing this collusion either abstain, he says, or vote for the right. He does not provide other arguments for the more or less popular support for the right. The radical left bears great responsibility for this state of working class and popular politics:

if this left had the audacity to propose real advances beyond current capitalism, it would gain the credibility it lacks. An audacious radical left is necessary to provide the coherence that the current piecemeal protest movements and defensive struggles still lack. The ‘movement’ could, then, reverse the social balance of power in favour of the working classes and make progressive advances possible. The successes won by popular movement in South America are proof of that.

In this formulation, however, Amin recognizes no difference between the working classes in peripheral countries and core countries because, he says, “Europeans are also clearly victims of the spread of generalized monopoly capitalism”.<sup>59</sup> Hardly, one would think, on anything nearly equivalent in scale, suggesting that the impulse for revolution remains in the South. On the whole, what Amin means by proposing advances is to make the kind of policy demands he has suggested above for a “polycentric” world. He offers no critique of the organizational policies and practices of these “left radical” groups. Meanwhile, Amin believes the future of the popular movements in Latin America are “uncertain” as they are. They are not so uncertain if they do not develop more centralized Party practices, the route that had been followed in Cuba following a successful, popular revolt.<sup>60</sup>

For Amin, “An alternative movement will only find the means to achieve stability if it succeeds in combining the three objectives around which the revolts have been mobilized: continuation of the democratization of society and politics, progressive social advances, and the affirmation of national sovereignty.”<sup>61</sup> That is, they have to get their demands right. But Amin offers no ideas about the question of actual power, of leadership and organization. In his mind, multiple alternatives are possible presently in the world having some potential to shift societies left and contribute to the building of the long, socialist road: the Bandung model plus “a hint of

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<sup>54</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 108.

<sup>55</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 109.

<sup>56</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 124.

<sup>57</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 121.

<sup>58</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 116.

<sup>59</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 119.

<sup>60</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 121.

<sup>61</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 122.

democracy”; “a democratic, popular, and national front”; and “an ‘Islamization’ of politics and society”.<sup>62</sup> Amin calls the present “the second awakening of the South” (the first was Bandung) and he wonders whether this revolt might possibly come together with “struggles that the workers in the North could be on the verge of undertaking”.<sup>63</sup>

Amin’s emphasis on “could be” is telling because there is evidence of plenty of alienation in the North and East, and therefore radical potential, but no evidence of any coherent or organized left that could channel this potential in a socialist direction. In fact, talk of “socialism” remains premature, Amin implies; all that is possible is to open popular struggles that have some left content in given social contexts and can therefore presumably contribute to the long transition. In the end, then Amin resolves the “scholastic” distinction between reform and revolution in favour of the latter. In tactical and practical terms, we agree with this assessment. Social democratic futures may represent the only viable present-day leftist political strategies in the North and East, but this is the case for both objective and subjective reasons. A realistic appraisal of the socialist-leaning potential of the working classes in the North and East must go beyond a sense of the “ripeness” of capitalism to be transformed (over a long time) and analyze the subjective, political conditions for a movement towards socialism, which are largely absent in the North and East. In this absence, the fascist alternative – barbarism – becomes more likely in the short- and medium-term because major crises are on the horizon, not least of which are crises driven in many ways by the social dislocations and violence brought about in the wake of climate change.

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<sup>62</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 122.

<sup>63</sup> Amin, *Russia and the Long Transition*, 133.