

## **Popular Movements Toward Socialism: Their Unity and Diversity**

by [Samir Amin](#)

(excerpted, see the whole piece here: <https://monthlyreview.org/2014/06/01/popular-movements-toward-socialism/>)

### **Communism, Higher Stage of Human Civilization**

*Toward a second wave of emergence for the states, peoples, and nations of the peripheries.*

The ambition of the movement toward socialism is to refound human society on other foundations than those that are fundamentally characteristic of capitalism. This future is conceived as realizing a higher stage of universal human civilization, not simply as realizing a more “just,” or even more “efficacious,” model of our familiar civilization (“modern” capitalist civilization).

Well, preparation of the future, even of the distant future, begins today. It is good to know what one wants. What social model? Based on what principles: Destructive competition among individuals or affirmation of the benefits of solidarity? A liberty that legitimizes inequality or a liberty tied to equality? Exploitation of the planet’s resources with no concern for the future or an exact accounting of the requirements for reproduction of the planet’s conditions of life?

Socialism will be democratic or it will not exist at all. On condition of understanding the democratization of society as an unending process that cannot be reduced to the formula of electoral multiparty representative as the definition of “real democracy.” The dominant Western media propounds “democracy first” for the countries of the South, which it understands as the immediate holding of multiparty elections; and many civil society organizations in the South have gone over to that proposition. Nevertheless, repeated experiments prove that this is merely a miserable farce which the imperialists and their local allies have no trouble manipulating to their own gain. In the centers, representative electoral democracy had always constituted the effective means for blocking any threats that labor struggles would become radicalized. Class struggles, which unfold on a basis of the extreme diversity of living conditions and segmentation within the laboring classes, articulated in these conditions to electoral settlement of political conflicts, had always been effective means for blocking the radicalization of popular movements. Electoralism (which Lenin called parliamentary cretinism) reinforces the negative effects of the segmentation of classes within the people and deprives of all effectiveness any strategy for building their unity. Western public opinion, alas, envisages no alternative to this system of political management, to which even the Communists have now gone over. Nevertheless, with the establishment of generalized-monopoly capitalism the electoral farce becomes totally visible, effacing the former right/left contrast.

The movement toward socialism has the duty of opening new fields for the invention of more advanced ways to manage political democracy.

John Bellamy Foster has argued convincingly that socialism, as understood by Marx, is ecological by its very nature. I add that green capitalism is still an impossible utopia because respect for the requirements of a political environmentalism worthy of the name is incompatible with respect for the basic laws governing capitalist accumulation. Here also the movement toward socialism has the duty of opening new fields for the invention of procedures of economic management that integrate the long run, that link democratic socialization of social relationships to the requirements for reproduction of life-spaces on the planet, which, in its turn, is the condition for transmitting the heritage of these common properties from one generation to another.

In its answers to these questions, the movement toward socialism cannot restrict itself to expressing pious vows, to propounding a remake of the nineteenth century's utopian socialisms. To avoid that fate it must answer the following questions: (1) Today, what is our scientific knowledge in the fields of anthropology and sociology that calls into question the "utopias" formulated in the past? (2) What is our new scientific knowledge about reproduction conditions of life on the planet? (3) Can this knowledge be integrated into an open Marxist thought?

In this general framework, we must give full treatment to the emergence projects of the states and peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The first wave of emergings, which extended successfully between 1950 and 1980, is exhausted. That page having been turned, the imperialist powers were able to retake the initiative and to impose the "*diktat*" (and not the supposed "consensus") of Washington. In its turn, this project of wildcat globalization is in implosion, offering to the peoples of the peripheries a chance to undertake a second wave of liberation and progress. What might be the goals of that second wave? There is a confrontation here among different political and cultural visions (reactionary, or illusory, or progressive) whose likelihoods will need to be studied.

### **To Exit From the Framework of Established Globalization**

Within the framework of the established globalization model, there is no space available for the movement toward socialism to begin its deployment onto the field of reality. So it has to write into its program both immediate and more distant strategic objectives that allow an exit from that framework. If not, there will be no exit from the model of "lumpen development" based on subcontracting and resource pillage, resulting in an indescribable pauperization of all the countries that accept their submission to the extension requirements of liberal globalization.

One often hears: "The problem is worldwide; its solution must be worldwide." The first proposition is correct, but the second does not flow from it. A transformation of globalization from above, for example by international negotiations in a UN framework, has absolutely no chance of permitting even the least progress. The long series of UN international conferences, from which nothing (as was foreseeable) has ever emerged, is evidence of that. The global system has never been transformed from above, but always starting from below, i.e., from initial changes of the line of development that at first became possible at local levels (or else national levels, in the framework of states/nations, which are the centers of crucial political struggles). Then conditions might eventually be formed to open possibilities for transformation of globalized relationships. Deconstruction must always be preliminary to the possibility of reconstructing differently. The example of Europe in crisis is testimony to that. The European structures will never undergo transformation from above by Brussels. Only disobedience by some European state, and then by another one, would make it possible to envisage the reconstruction of "another Europe."

The strategy of starting transformations by action at national levels can be summed up in the following sentence: one must refuse to adjust unilaterally to the requirements for extension of the established globalization, replace it by prioritizing getting to work on "sovereign projects," and force the global system to adjust to the requirements for the unfolding of these national projects.

*But what then is meant by "sovereign projects"?*

In certain conditions, getting to work on sovereign projects opens a space for advances of the movement toward socialism. Of course, the very notion of "sovereign project" is open to discussion. Given the degree of

penetration of transnational investments in all domains and all countries we cannot avoid the question: What sort of sovereignty are you talking about?

The dynamics of contemporary capitalism are in many ways determined by the global conflict over natural resources. The matter is a special question whose examination is not to be drowned in other general considerations. The United State's dependence for many of those resources and the growing demand from China are a challenge to South America, Africa, and the Middle East, which are particularly well endowed with resources and have been shaped by the history of their pillage. Can one develop, in these domains, national and regional policies that initiate rational and equitable planetary management, benefitting all the peoples? Can one develop, written into that perspective, new relationships between China and the countries of the South at issue? Will they link China's access to those resources to support for the industrialization of the countries involved (something the supposed "donors" of the OECD refuse to do)?

The framework for the unfolding of an effective sovereign project is not limited to the field of international action. An independent national policy remains fragile and vulnerable so long as it does not enjoy real national and popular support, which requires that it be based on economic and social policies enabling the popular classes to benefit from "development." Social stability, which is the condition for success of a sovereign project confronted by the destabilization policies of the imperialists, is at that price. We therefore have to examine the nature of the relationships among different established or possible sovereign projects and the bases of the power systems: national, democratic, and popular project, or (illusory?) project for national capitalism?

We can then, in this framework, draw up the "balance sheet" of the "sovereign projects" currently being put into effect by the "emerging" countries.

(1) China is the only country truly engaged on the path of a sovereign project, and is the only one for which this is the case. This is a coherent project: it articulates the planned establishment of a self-centered (although simultaneously and aggressively open toward exporting) modern and complete industrial system to a mode of agricultural development based on the modernization of small farms not owned by the farmers—thus guaranteeing access to the land for everyone. But what is the nature of the objective of sovereignty being pursued? Is it a matter of national bourgeois sovereignty (whose success, in my opinion, remains based on illusions), or of national/popular sovereignty? Is it a matter of a state capitalism based on the illusion of the governing role of a new national bourgeoisie (part of which is made up of a state bourgeoisie)? Or of a state capitalism with a social dimension, evolving toward a possible "state socialism" that would itself be a stage on the long road to socialism? The answer to that question has not yet been given by the facts. Here I refer the reader to my argument about the future alternatives on offer to contemporary China.<sup>5</sup>

(2) Russia has returned to the international political stage, posing itself as the adversary of Washington. For all that, is it engaged on the path of a sovereign project? Yes, perhaps, in the intentions of the power-holders to rebuild a state capitalism independent of the *diktats* of the globalized monopolies? But the economic management of the country remains liberal, controlled by the oligarchy of private monopolies established by Yeltsin on the Western model. This policy, then, remains without any social dimension that would enable it to rally its people behind it.

(3) Elements of a sovereign policy exist in India, notably state-supported industrial policies of private national industrial monopolies. But nothing more than that: its general economic policies remain liberal, tragically speeding up the pauperization of the majority of peasants.

(4) In the same fashion elements of a sovereign policy exist in Brazil, carried out by big private Brazilian financial and industrial capital and big capitalist agricultural estates. But here as in India the general economic policies remain liberal, bringing no solution to the problems of poverty in a country that has become 90 percent urbanized—except that poverty has been lessened through redistributive public welfare measures. In Brazil, as in India, the power-holders' reluctance to go further favors the ambiguous behavior of big capital, tempted to seek compromises with international capital. The fabulous natural riches of Brazil, and their exploitation under deplorable conditions (destruction of the Amazonian rainforest), further strengthen their efforts to insert the country in the established globalization system.

(5) There exists no sovereign project in South Africa, whose system remains under Anglo-American imperial control. What then are the conditions for emergence of a sovereign project in that country? What new relationships with Africa would be implied by such emergence?

(6) Can non-continent-size countries develop sovereign projects? Within what limits? What forms of regional association might facilitate their advancement?

*Where to start?*

With regard to the sovereign projects which the movement toward socialism ought to promote, I propose to start by identifying the priorities of action on the economic level and on the political level.

*In regard to the economic level:*

I suggest identifying the initial priorities with an exit from financial globalization. But take note: this involves only the financial aspect of globalization, not globalization in all its dimensions, notably the commercial ones.

We start from the hypothesis that we are dealing with the weak link of the established globalized neoliberal system. With this in mind we will examine:

- the question of the dollar as universal money, of its future, taking into account the United States' increasing foreign indebtedness;
- questions in relation to the prospective adoption of the principle of "total convertibility" of the yuan, the ruble, and the rupee;<sup>6</sup>
- the question of "exit from convertibility" of certain emerging-country currencies (Brazil, South Africa);
- the measures that might be taken in regard to management of their national currencies by the fragile countries (especially the African ones).

Some initiatives, whose scope, however, remains modest, have been taken towards a deconstruction of the integrated globalized financial system. We here mention the establishment of the Shanghai Conference, the agreements between China and ASEAN, ALBA, the Bank of the South, the "Sucre" project, and the BRICS Bank.

*In regard to the political level:*

I will suggest prioritizing the implementation of strategies capable of holding in check the geopolitics and geostrategics developed by the United States and its subaltern allies within the triad.

Our starting point is the following: the capitalist monopolies of the historic imperialist (United States, Europe, Japan) powers' pursuit of worldwide dominion is threatened by growing conflicts between: (1) on the one hand the goals of the triad (to maintain its dominion); and (2) on the other the aspirations of the emerging countries and those of the peoples victimized by and in revolt against "neoliberalism." In these conditions the United States and its subaltern allies (linked together in "the triad's collective imperialism") have chosen to add to their

risks by taking recourse to violence and military interventions. Testifying to this are: (a) the deployment and reinforcement of U.S. military bases (Africom and others); (b) military interventions in the Middle East (Iraq, Syria, tomorrow Iran?); and (c) measures taken by the triad to encircle China militarily, including Japanese provocations, and manipulations involving China/India and China/Southeast Asia conflicts.

But it appears that, while the violence of imperialist powers' interventions remains in fact on the agenda, these powers find it ever harder to respond to the requirements for the coherent strategy that is the condition for possible success. Is the United States at bay? Is its decline a passing one, or is it definitive? Washington's responses, though made in a day-to-day fashion, remain no less dangerously criminal.

In confrontation with these major challenges, what strategies of international political (or even military) alliance might force a withdrawal on the U.S. project of military control over the whole planet? The importance of possible advances on this terrain is obvious. It is not by chance that the BRICS, and behind them many countries of the South—some having to various degrees entered on the path of sovereign projects, others still mired in the ruts of lumpen development—still express refusal to support the U.S. military adventures and dare to take initiatives contradicting Washington (like the use of the veto by Russia and China)? It is necessary to go further in these directions, in a broader and more systematic fashion.

### Footnote

1. \*Editors' Note: For references to this see Howard B. Davis, *Nationalism and Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 61–63. Davis points out that such comments were confined to Marx and Engels's earlier works, roughly before 1860.

### Notes

1. ↩ Teodor Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 97–126.
2. ↩ Samir Amin, *Three Essays on Marx's Value Theory* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013), 67–76.
3. ↩ See in particular my discussion of this in *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013).
4. ↩ Ibid, 133–47.
5. ↩ See Samir Amin, "[China 2013](#)," *Monthly Review* 64, no. 10 (March 2013): 14–33.
6. ↩ Samir Amin, "[The Chinese Yuan and HSBC Bank](#)," *Pambazuka* no. 643, August 13, 2013, <http://pambazuka.org/>.

### References

The paper deals strictly with the issue as indicated in the title. Yet it hints to concepts that I introduced in my recent writings: generalized monopoly capitalism, generalized and segmented proletarianization, implosion of the system, the historical trajectory of capitalism, the long systemic crisis of declining capitalism, emergent nations, lumpen development, revolutionary advances and retreats in a number of African, Asian, and Arab countries, green capitalism and green socialism, a critique of international aid. The reader will find developments on these issues in the following bibliography:

### Books

1. [The Liberal Virus](#) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003)

2. *Obsolescent Capitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2003), chapters 4 and 5
3. *Beyond US Hegemony* (London: Zed Books, 2006), chapters 2, 4, and 5
4. *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?* (Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2011), chapters 1, 2, and 4
5. [\*The Law of Worldwide Value\*](#) ((New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), chapter 4
6. [\*The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism\*](#) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013), chapters 1 and 2
7. *Global History: A View from the South* (Oxford : Pambazuka, 2011), chapters 5 and 6
8. [\*Three Essays on Marx's Value Theory\*](#) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013)

## Articles

1. Samir Amin interviewed by Ali Amady Dieng, *Development and Change* 38, no.6 (November 2007): 1149–59.
2. “[‘Market Economy’ or Oligopoly Finance Capital](#),” *Monthly Review* 59, no. 11 (April 2008): 51–61.
3. “[Nepal, A Promising Revolutionary Advance](#),” *Monthly Review* 60, no.9 (February 2009): 12–16.
4. “[Seize The Crisis](#),” *Monthly Review* 61, no.7 (December 2009): 1–16.
5. “[Capitalism and the Ecological Footprint](#),” *Monthly Review* 61, no. 6 (November 2009): 19–22.
6. “[The Trajectory of Historical Capitalism and Marxism’s Tricontinental Vocation](#),” *Monthly Review* 62, no. 9 (February 2011): 1–18.
7. “[Modernity and Religions Interpretations](#),” in Lansana Keita, ed., *Philosophy and African Development* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2011).
8. “[Y a-t-il une solution aux problèmes](#)” *Recherches Internationales*, no. 89 (January–March 2011): 233–36.
9. “[Egypte: Changement: demandez le programme!](#)” *Afrique-Asie*, December 28, 2012, <http://afrique-asie.fr>.
10. “Preface,” in Hocine Belalloufi, ed., *La démocratie en Algérie: Réforme ou Révolution?* (Alger: APIC, 2012).
11. “[The Center Will Not Hold: The Rise and Decline of Liberalism](#),” *Monthly Review* 63, no. 8 (January 2012): 45–57.
12. “[The Surplus in Monopoly Capital and the Imperialist Rent](#),” *Monthly Review* 64, no. 3 (July–August 2012): 78–85.
13. “[China 2013](#),” *Monthly Review* 64, no. 10 (March 2013): 14–33.
14. “Class Suicide, The Post Bourgeoisie and the Challenge of Development,” in Firoze Manji, ed., *Claim no Easy Victory* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2013).
15. “Audacity, More Audacity,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 45, no. 3 (September 2013): 400–409.
16. “[Egypt, July 2013](#)” (interview on July 15, 2013), July 24, 2013, <http://samiramin1931.blogspot.com>.
17. “[Egypt Today: The Challenges for the Democratic Popular Movement](#),” August 23, 2013, <http://samiramin1931.blogspot.com>.
18. “[The Chinese Yuan and HSBC Bank](#),” *Pambazuka* no. 643, August 13, 2013, <http://www.pambazuka.org>.