

THE CONCEPT OF TRANSITION

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There is much discussion about the concept of transitions to qualify periods of socio-economic or political change. This is the case today, facing the exhaustion of the post-neoliberal experiences in Latin America, for internal and external reasons (global crisis), but which does not mean the exhaustion of anti-systemic struggles. Indeed, the term transition may have several meanings according to the reading of events.

Karl Marx developed the concept with regard to the passage of the feudal mode of production to capitalism in Europe and Maurice Godelier, French economist and anthropologist, sums it up as follows: it is "the particular phase of a society which has more and more difficulties to reproduce the economic and social system on which it is based and to reorganize itself on the basis of another system becoming the general shape of the new conditions" (Maurice Godelier, in Georges Labica, *Dictionnaire critique du Marxisme*, PUF, Paris, 1982, 1165). This is obviously a long process, nonlinear, more or less violent according to the resistance of the social groups involved. Many analysts believe that capitalism reached the end of its historical role, because it has become a system that destroys the very foundations of its success, nature and labor, as already said by Carlos Marx. That is why Samir Amin talks of "senile capitalism", why Immanuel Wallerstein published an article in the midst of the financial crisis, saying that we are assisting to the "end of capitalism" and why Istvan Meszaros talks about its inability to ensure the maintenance of the social metabolism of humanity.

If, on the one hand, we can accept the idea that we are experiencing a transition from the capitalist mode of production to another form and that the process can be precipitated by the climate crisis, on the other hand, one should not forget that such a change will be the result of a social process that will not be achieved without struggles and a transformation of power relations. In other words, capitalism will not fall by itself and the convergence of all social and political struggles is a requirement to get a result. History teaches us that capitalism is able of transforming its own contradictions into mechanisms of accumulation. Some are speaking today about "social capitalism" and "green capitalism".

The theoretical development of the concept within the historical context of the current systemic crisis will enable the development of tools to evaluate current social and political experiences and to know if they are real processes of transition or not. This is particularly the case in Latin America where political regimes began processes of change toward a socialism of the XXI century. The fundamental question is to what extent Latin American political experiences were transitions to another social model or adaptations of contemporary capitalism to new ecological and social demands.

Transitions that can lead to a shift of paradigm are numerous, but they require a specific world view. Many of the measures presented as transitions are in fact adaptations of the system and no guidance towards a truly post-capitalist construction. It is clearly the case of most of the countries of the South and also of the Treaties between these countries and the BRICS. The development of a "modern capitalism" in Latin America, land grabbing in Africa by India and China, the expansion of monoculture in South-East Asia for the production of agro-fuels or

wood, are not transitions, but paths towards a new capitalism, with all the consequences of concentration of economic power and ignorance of externalities (environmental and social damages) which constitute the characteristics of all capitalism, even "green" and "social".

The concept can also be applied to particular processes within a general transformation, for example in the specific economic, social, cultural, political, religious fields. The main objective is not to lose the radicalism of the goal (another paradigm of human development on the planet), and to define actions that may lead to the result, taking into account, on the one hand, the specific circumstances of material development and secondly, the existing power relations in the economic-social and political fields. A typical example are the economies of extraction, which despite being ecologically and socially harmful and largely dominated by the interests of international capital, cannot be stopped from one day to another. In countries of Latin America having begun important economic and social changes, they are the financial source of the new policies. This is the case of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. In such cases, transition would mean: (1) to initiate an economic policy based on the needs of the internal market (which is medium and long step), (2) to promote stricter ecological and social laws for farms, (3) to pay costs (environmental and social damage) users and (4) promoting international legislation to prevent the phenomenon of "comparative advantage" in favor of applying laxer regulations.

Using this conceptual instrument cannot serve as a pretext for political or ideological concessions of a social-democratic type, i.e. accepting that the development of productive forces requires the adoption of principles, tools and recipes of capitalism. That means the strengthening the power of social classes most opposed to a change of society, such as the case of Brazil, despite advances in other domains, or, as in socialist countries, like China and Vietnam, promote new social distances which will inevitably lengthen the process of transition.

This, indeed, poses a fundamental problem: how to develop productive forces in a socialist perspective and for the common good of humanity and which forces to develop in priority? It is a problem that the socialist countries and the progressive regimes of Latin America, could not resolve properly. It has been the source of both the failures and the return toward a neo-liberal orientation of most of them. As Maurice Godelier said in his lectures at the Catholic University of Louvain, "*The drama of socialism is that it has had to learn to walk with the feet of capitalism*".

To give concrete examples, to develop organic peasant agriculture, as it has been proposed in an Asian seminar at Renmin (popular) University in Beijing in 2010 and in a Latin American meeting in La Paz in 2013, instead of promoting monocultures of export-oriented agriculture or, to reorganize local railways networks in Latin America, rather than adopting the projects of IIRSA (the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America) are steps toward a transition. Many other proposals could be thought of as elements of a real transition than are not a simple adaptation of the existing system.

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