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Build a new international is necessary and urgent

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ABSTRACT

Samir Amin was one of the most creative Marxists, but also an orthodox, as his appeal for a new international proves, consistent with his defense of the socialist revolution against a decaying capitalist system, which threatens with the extinction of human civilization. However, in a contradictory way, if in the past the material conditions did not exist, they exist today, materializing in a distorted manner by capitalism, the organization of a revolutionary international leadership has never been so non-existent. This article begins by demonstrating the systemic conditions that require the proletariat to build a new International, the reasons for the current difficulty in achieving it; and, from the analysis of the most successful experience to date, the Third International, lessons are drawn for a future Fifth International.

KEYWORDS

Third international; fifth international; proletarian internationalism; history of the communist international

Samir Amin, a leading scholar and co-founder of the world-systems tradition, died on August 12, 2018. Just before his death, he published, along with close allies, a call for ‘workers and the people’ to establish a ‘fifth international’ [<https://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/letter-intent-inaugural-meeting-international-workers-and-peoples>] to coordinate support to progressive movements. To honor Samir Amin’s invaluable contribution to world-systems scholarship, we are pleased to present readers with a selection of essays responding to Amin’s final message for today’s anti-systemic movements. This forum is being co-published between Globalizations [<https://www.tandfonline.com/rglo>], the Journal of World-Systems Research [<http://jwsr.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/jwsr/issue/view/75>] and Pambazuka News [<https://www.pambazuka.org/>]. Additional essays and commentary can be found in these outlets.

Samir Amin was one of the great Marxist theorists of the twentieth century, with a creative application of Marxism, but demonstrated in his commitment to revolution a fidelity to the basic assumptions of this current. The Marxist tripod is composed of the dialectical method, the labour theory of value and the revolution, as several have pointed out. Contrary to an anti-Marxist version of Marxism, which removes the element of revolution, as if this were only an epistemological current and not the scientific theory of social transformation, Amin has always articulated the three.

In one of his later writings he proves this once more by stating that ‘It is imperative to reconstruct the Internationale of workers and peoples’. There is no way of thinking of the dialectical overcoming (*aufhebung*) of capitalism without a vision of totality that only a proletarian international organization can build. The smallest international organization has a perspective that a national

organization lacks. Nor is it possible to overcome the process of global dissemination of the overexploitation of labour without a unitary articulation of a socialist offensive that has as its horizon the overcoming of material labour, of the limits imposed by capitalist production relations, and the opening of a kingdom of abundance, out of the world of need that humanity has been forced to live in.

This horizon is a possibility that the Scientific and Technological Revolution (STR) opened since the middle of the last century, by engendering globalization, which is, in fact, the definitive contradiction between the limits of capitalist relations of production and the socialized and internationalized productive forces. Thus, this process ‘confronts the capitalist mode of production and its legal-political and ideological superstructure with a structure of productive forces that it can not fully absorb’ (Martins, 2011, p. 113).¹ In this way, the STR poses the possibility of realizing the wishes of the Marxists of the early 20th century, who believed that this transition was possible when, in fact, the material conditions were not placed. The misunderstanding of imperialism as a decadent form of capitalism, and not as its mature form, blurred the capacity for analysis to differentiate conjunctural crises from the structural crisis of capitalism, and served ‘to justify the oblivion of the material conditions of possibility of communist revolution’ (Veraza, 2012, p. 125). This explains the impossibility of a socialist transition at that time, but it posits the possibility and necessity of it today.

At that time, material conditions were not given, but there were capable national revolutionary directions and the Third International was built. Nowadays these material conditions are not only posed, but are rotting, paraphrasing what was stated by Leon Trotsky in 1936, but with the wrong timing. But there are no subjective conditions for revolution. The social and environmental crisis we face, which threatens even the possibility of human survival, demonstrates the enormity of the challenge posed by this deadly contradiction.

However, contrary to tendentially subjectivist interpretations, in particular trotskyists and anarchists, which point out all responsibility to class leaderships, we must remember, as Karl Marx claimed, that it is necessary to ‘educate the educator himself’ (Marx, 2002, n.p.). The leader of the class must be educated in leadership, not a product of oneself. The popular leaders are neither what they are by themselves, by subjective impulses; nor are they merely a reflection of circumstances. It is obligatory in this question to rescue the process of dialectical co-constitution, ‘the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice’ (Marx, 2002, n.p.). That is, it is necessary to re-establish the necessary understanding of the correlation between subjective and objective elements of analysis, including on the formation of the workers’ directions, and avoid moralistic judgments that explain the phenomena based on ‘betrayals’. If leaders help to shape class organizations, these and the circumstances of class existence and consciousness shape the leaders. Liberation is ‘not a gift, not a self-achievement, but a mutual process’ (Freire, 2005, p. 7).

It is not possible to imagine that our era of immense objective and especially subjective setbacks would not be reflected in the class and in its directions. This is an element that can not be ruled out in the constitution of a new International, and must be taken into account, as it will be one of the greatest obstacles to its realization. It should guide its practice in relation to the national leaderships and organizations of the International, but mainly its relation to the great oppressed and exploited human masses, so that it does not fall into a sectarian dynamic that marks many groups mistakenly called Marxists. A dialogue must be established.

Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated. (Freire, 2005, p. 65)

This relationship, based on manipulation, on the dissolution of the organized and self-organized class into masses of individuals followers of demagogues, which pseudo-fulfill themselves in the heteronomy of the leader, serves towards fascism, to the counter-revolution, never to the revolution, socialism and progress. As the growth of the far right around the world demonstrates, neoliberal hegemony has engendered, with the economic destruction of class organizations, the fertile field of misery and existential despair where these forces can develop, and also generated the ultraindividualist ideological environment that let the dilution of the class in mass, which can easily become a fascist mass.

However, the creation of an International is also a necessity for other reasons. Above all, it is not possible to think of revolution as a local or particular process, but rather as an international articulation, although having national moments, de-linkages and new linkages. It has specific national paths, which reflect correlations of forces and peculiarities of each social formation, both for the victory of proletarian power and after in the socialist transition. This view was defended even by those accused of denying the overriding necessity of this international process, such as Josef Stalin. Although he later changed his perspective, stated in 1924:

But the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and establishment of the power of the proletariat in one country does not yet mean that the complete victory of socialism has been ensured. [...] No, it does not. [...] the revolution which has been victorious in one country must regard itself not as a self-sufficient entity, but as an aid, as a means for hastening the victory of the proletariat in other countries. (Stalin, 2008, n.p.)

We now know from past experiences that a socialist transition ‘proves to be more complex and tortuous as less developed the country in which it develops is and the more unfavorable and dramatic is the international context in which it operates’ (Losurdo, 2007, p. 24). Hence the importance of concerted international action to support these transitions and to create a more peaceful and supportive environment.

The imperative of the formation of a new International is expressed by the new phase of an imperialism that advances with radical processes of recolonization and colonization, as it happens in the global periphery, including in the south and east of Europe. The setback in the socialist field in the last decades has opened space for a reactionary offensive on a large scale, giving new impetus to capitalism. The contradictions of capital, insoluble by capital itself, impose neoliberalism, financierization and mass unemployment as an instrument of preservation against the productive forces that it can not control and to dismantle the organizations of the popular sectors. It is the end of the ‘Golden Age’ of reformism and the possibility of achievements, albeit minimal, of rights and better living conditions for the masses. As a result we see the suffocation of popular and national sovereignty, preventing the accomplishment of bourgeois revolutions’ tasks not yet realized in peripheral countries, such as Agrarian Reform or the right to self-determination. Imperialism will play an important role in the almost eternal affairs of Palestine and Western Sahara, and it will breed new ones, such as the Libyan collapse or the Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovar protectorates.

The globalization of the productive forces has created new forms of capitalist organization that enable large transnational imperialist conglomerates to crush the organization of workers, promote massive relocations and exert a blackmail power that benefits from the inability of international workers’ articulation. Regardless of how great the local and national economic struggles of the working class can be, as Marx warned

past experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their

struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts. (Marx, 2000, n.p.)

Therefore, it is necessary that these converge, not only in economic perspective, but also in politics, even at a world level, with the experience already have taught

[...] the working classes the duty to master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power; when unable to prevent, to combine in simultaneous denunciations [...]. (Marx, 2000, n.p.)

Only an international organization is able to convert the working class' great power of the '[...] numbers; but numbers weigh in the balance only if united by combination and led by knowledge' (Marx, 2000, n.p.). Because '[...] the emancipation of the working classes requires their fraternal concurrence [...]' (Marx, 2000, n.p.).

This becomes even more imperative when we compare the state of fragmentation and disorganization of our class at the international level with the ruling class's organizations of various natures and objectives: UN, NATO, World Bank, G7, IMF, World Economic Forum, EU, OECD, Bilderberg Club; Socialist International, etc. There are even organizations that congregate only fascists, such as the former World Anti-Communist League, now ironically called World League for Freedom and Democracy. There is the action of many organizations of the imperialist powers, in particular those of the US hegemonic power, such as the CIA, and its various so-called non-governmental organizations, but which are in reality parastatals, e.g. the National Endowment for Democracy. There are even oligarchs who operate worldwide, such as Georges Soros and his foundation. Faced with this dispersion, and even contradiction in the action between these various bourgeois poles, as well as the nonexistence of a bourgeois international central committee, why would the situation of workers be different? Why can we not maintain the present reality of dispersion of proletarian organizations?

These questions overlook a fundamental fact: the intrinsic difference between the tasks of the bourgeois class and those of the working class. An organization should reflect in the most appropriate way the needs imposed by the tasks that are placed. The bourgeoisie as the ruling class doesn't need to produce a concerted transformation of the world. This is positive for this class, because its internal divisions, both sectoral or national and international, would make such unity impossible. For the bourgeoisie it is enough to maintain the status quo. Disputes between them can alter the correlation between their fractions and representative political sectors, but not the whole system, which is even strengthened by this appearance of plurality, even though these disputes can produce disastrous consequences for the peoples, such as successive wars, as the carnage of the two great wars. This multi-dimensional action produced by different groups and organizations generates a myriad of effects such that it becomes omnipresent, working to solidify the political, economic and, above all, ideological structures of domination. Some spaces of international institutionalization can be produced to answer specific questions, and this will suffice.

The task of the proletariat, however, is of a different nature. The international proletariat must destroy the status quo, the whole system. Therefore, if the normal functioning benefits the bourgeoisie, it is necessary for the proletariat to constitute and maximize its energies for the purpose of articulating, first in several national spheres, then on a world scale, the overcoming of bourgeois power. This task is far more demanding than that of the rising bourgeoisie in the past, for two reasons. First, by the breadth of the scale, which is now international, when before, due to the reach of the productive forces, it was national. Second, due to the depth of the transformation. As antagonistic as the bourgeoisie was in some cases to the Old Regime, what was at stake was the mere substitution

of one exploiting class for another, not the enormous historical novelty of replacing an exploiting class by an exploited class which in turn can only carry out its complete emancipation with the end of all classes. While the capitalist state has culminated the prior development of capitalism in the economic field, the embryos of socialism can not develop within capitalism, except in its degenerate capitalist expressions. For example, the possibility of overcoming the material labour that automation poses, the material basis of socialism, cannot generate human liberation in capitalism and ends up creating massive structural unemployment. Hence, it is only through political victory, the destruction of the bourgeois state and the construction of a broad set of proletarian states, that workers can break the straitjacket of capitalist production relations and develop the socialist seeds. This last fact also implies a greater challenge, since the bourgeoisie as a privileged class already had resources to prepare itself for the task of the future management of its society, even before reaching political power. The proletariat, on the other hand, does not possess it naturally; on the contrary, the normal functioning of the system forces its withdrawal and apathy. So, the International would also serve to train the cadres and the masses in the tasks of future management of the proletarian states, a mass school of revolution and socialist management. Therefore, it should develop in its internal functioning a democratic socialist dynamic, so that it was a school not only theoretical, but also practical.

If it is necessary to build a proletarian International, an executive committee for the world revolution, what traits should it have? History is always the best master. Instead of establishing a reflection on utopian perspectives, we must return to past experiences in order to avoid the mistakes and to reproduce the successes in this new International. The civilizational decadence that we have already achieved does not give us wide margins of errors. There is no room for experimentalism. It is necessary to incorporate the

decades and decades of a particularly intense historical period, which includes the October revolution, the Chinese, and Cuban revolution, etc. [... which cannot be] classified as simple misunderstandings, without meaning and without relevance to the 'authentic' revolutionary theory, [... which would have been] definitively delivered in texts that we should only rediscover and rethink! (Losurdo, 2007, p. 18)

These are part of the heritage of the world proletariat in its history of struggle. For having been the main experience, we will make an analysis of the Third International to extract the possible lessons, presented on theses at the end.

Its importance and success can be measured in multiple ways. Between its years of existence (1919–1943) the Communist International reached practically the entire world, to a great extent not reached before or after by any world class, political or ideological organization or movement. Even the successful Second International focused mainly on Europe, e.g. in Latin America it had parties only in Argentina and Uruguay. The Third International lasted only less than the Second International (1889–1916), and had much more time and vitality than other experiences. The Third International was involved in the most important events of its period, as in the solidarity with the Spanish Revolution and the struggle against Nazi-Fascism. One of its main achievements was to be able to build, even with more or less success, a whole constellation of organizations, such as Kresintern (Peasant International); the Young Communist International; the Profintern (Red International of Labour Unions) and the International Red Aid.

Unlike the First International, which emerged after initiatives of solidarity with the defeated Polish Revolt (1863), or the Second, which emerged from small victories in the expansion of socialist space in the late nineteenth century, with the formation of socialist parties in several European countries, the Third International came about thanks to the greatest victory of the workers until

today, the October Revolution. The impact of this would be even greater as it came a few years after the break-up of the Second International in 1916, but which had already collapsed in 1914, in Lenin's words, when war credits were voted by almost all the socialist parties of the belligerent countries – with the notable exceptions of Russia and Serbia.

With the Second International, we can see the emergence of an element that will be extremely negative also in the Comintern: the existence of a dominant party. The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was to be the model and main reference because it was the most successful party, had Engels in its origins, and the presence of a great theoretician such as Karl Kautsky. The Comintern will follow, in turn, the Bolshevik Party.

It was in Russia, in the midst of the civil war and under the leadership of Lenin, that in January 1919 the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party together with foreign directions issued a call for the formation of a Revolutionary International. Its most important achievement was that it became a revolutionary pole that brought together in its orbit activists from all over the world, leading to the formation of communist parties, whether coming from divisions of opportunist socialist parties or from anarchist organizations (as in Portugal and Brazil).

Ideologically, the greatest successes were to have defeated the two opposing tendencies that emerged within: first opportunism, then ultra-leftism. The first suffered a major defeat already in the Second Congress (June 1920). Until then there were no clear boundaries and the parties were mostly poorly formed. Important definitions were missing, such as the relationship with the unions, the internal working regime, etc. As is often in processes of this nature, the opportunists began to flock in droves. This was especially serious where the parties came from splits of opportunist socialist parties. That is why the 21 conditions of admission were established, which separated the wheat from the chaff. However, the rigidity of these norms, adding to the necessary decisions that could be left to local decision, such as the name of the party, prevented an institutional adaptation that should exist in front of different realities.

Perhaps this rigidity, which imposed, for example, an almost automatic purge of parties, without safeguarding the necessary times that the class struggle and the internal party life in each country demanded, was responsible, in the then existing conjuncture, for the emergence of the ultra-leftism that found answer in the Third (1921) and Fourth (1922) congresses. A tough action was required against those who had not understood the shift from the revolutionary conjuncture to the reactionary, not understanding the need to adapt the tactics. However, it is undeniable that the imposition of a sudden and total break with the opportunists determined at the previous congress, helped to build a sectarian culture that wanted to extend this rupture to organisms like the unions and saw opportunism in what should be the communist practice of agitate partial demands of the masses, even if not only for the fulfillment of these, but for the advancement of class consciousness and organization.

In these first four congresses, one success was the elaboration of theses on central themes: the question of the woman, the black and the national and colonial question, affirming the correct Bolshevik defense of the right to self-determination of the peoples. Nevertheless mistakes were made in this respect, such as the rejection of the request for help of the Catalan independence leader, Francesc Macià i Llussà, to overthrow the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera in 1926.

There were other failures. For example, the failure of the 1935 uprising in Brazil. It may also be noted in the wrong directions given to Tito, that if he had followed them he would have been swallowed up by the reaction. These errors express in the first case the tendencies of imposition of politics to the local parties, disregarding the analyzes of the militants of their own countries; in the second case, by placing the interests of the dominant party, even more so, of the interests of the dominant state over the local revolutionary interests.

However, the biggest mistake was the refusal to establish a front with the German social-democracy against Nazism, equating both with the pseudo-concept of ‘social-fascism’, which allowed the fascist victory. This defeat signified the harbinger of the Comintern disintegration.

Six theses for a new international:

Briefly, from the analysis of the Comintern, we will point out six initial theses, which should be developed in the future. The new International would have to:

- (1) Undertake a broader organization of all the oppressed and exploited, especially among the most attacked, creating trade union fronts and fighting against all oppressions (chauvinism, racism, fascism, homophobia, national oppression, among others). It must carry out a relentless defense of peoples’ self-determination.
- (2) Theoretical plurality. The end of the USSR made the polemics of the second half of the twentieth century useless and outdated. We return to the controversy that occurred in the Second International, with the disjunctive reform or revolution. Therefore, the new International needs to embrace all revolutionaries, independent of their origins: Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, etc.² It is necessary to the peaceful coexistence of broadest theoretical differences, but the political decisions have to be accepted by all after being voted. Only in this way can it be an agglutinator of all revolutionary sectors.
- (3) To perform the above, must permanently carry out a theoretical-ideological battle against opportunist and ultra-leftist deviations.
- (4) From the organizational point of view, the International should take priority over national parties. However, without discarding the opinions of those, who should have autonomy to the most important decisions, such as the action for taking power. The International must have an educational role, but cannot substitute national directions or intervene.
- (5) It will also have to avoid the tendency to establish a dominant party, ensuring equality between the parties in the direction of the international and creating counterbalancing mechanisms against the strongest ones, with balanced composition, not by the effective of the parties. Only in this way will it prevent an international direction from becoming a transmission belt. Among other measures, congresses and headquarters should be done and chosen in a rotating system.
- (6) It must have a complete material and political separation from the Proletarian States. This is fundamental so that the International does not become a transmission belt for national interests. However, the International must unconditionally defend these states against imperialism, but from an autonomous position that allows even criticism when necessary.

Proletarians of all countries, unite!

Notes

1. All quotations were freely translated into English by the author.
2. As stated by the most important historical leader of communism in Portugal, Cunhal (2008, n.p.), when addressing the theme of the international communist movement:

The international communist movement and its component parties have undergone profound changes as a result of the collapse of the USSR and other socialist countries [...]. There were parties that denied his past struggle, their class nature, its goal of a socialist society and its revolutionary theory [...]. This new situation in the international communist movement has opened in

society a vacant space in which other revolutionary parties have taken particular importance, which, in the concrete conditions of their countries, have identified with the communist parties in important and sometimes fundamental aspects of their objectives and action. That is why, when speaking today of the international communist movement, one cannot, as was once done, put a border between communist parties and any other revolutionary parties. The communist movement now has a new composition and new limits in motion.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

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