

Conclusion

After this too rapid and partial survey of the new economic geography of the world, the reader will, I trust, be convinced of the need to beg the duckbill's pardon, even if its viability is problematic. There is therefore no need to reiterate the methodological considerations of our first chapter. But I would like to outline a few political considerations. Not as to whether or not we should reject or support the strategies of bloody Taylorization or peripheral Fordism in order to break with underdevelopment: that is a matter for militant workers, peasants and intellectuals in the countries concerned. But as to the attitude that militant trade unionists and intellectuals in the former imperialist metropolis should take towards the NICs, whose manufactures are now beginning to compete with the centre. It seems to me, speaking as a European, that the preceding analysis allows us to advance the following conclusions.

The 'old division of labour' has proved to be less rigid than we thought. Whilst capitalism in the industrial countries still needs a labour force and raw materials from poor and rural countries, it certainly no longer needs to keep the outside world in a state of industrial non-development in order to flood it with its products. Since the Second World War, Fordism, which is an intensive regime of accumulation centred upon mass consumption in the developed capitalist countries, has developed its own markets. The relative

failure of early import-substitution policies cannot be ascribed to an imperialist desire to block competition from new producers. It reflects the temporary inability of the countries in question to insert themselves into the virtuous circle of intensive accumulation.

It was when the weaknesses of its regime became apparent that central capitalism had to look once more to the periphery for help, not in the shape of markets, but in the shape of low-cost production. This coincided with the local ruling classes' ambition to impose a new form of industrialization on their countries. A new division of labour was superimposed upon the old, but it did not replace it. Branch circuits and production were distributed across countries with different degrees of skills and with different wage-levels.

Insofar as this process simply involved the relocation of productive segments of labour-intensive industries, the market was still primarily in the developed countries. Bloody Taylorization improved the living standards of its peripheral victims to only a very minor extent. But as peripheral Fordism developed, the world regime of accumulation, which was being squeezed in the centre, found a last opportunity to expand. Real industrial growth in certain countries in the South provided the North with outlets for its advanced technology and capital goods. In exchange, the South supplied cheap consumer goods and components. This did not really reduce the central industries' market, as the extension of the wage system and the rising purchasing-power of the middle classes in the NICs helped to increase world demand.

It was not the increase in oil rents, which simply redistributed surplus-value on a world scale, that put an end to this final phase of growth of the 1970s, which had been moderate in the centre, rapid in some countries, and negative as far as the broad rural masses were concerned. Nor was it competition from cheap commodities produced by exploiting workers in the periphery. On the whole, the competition was marginal, and the creation of jobs in the North for workers producing capital goods for the South more than compensated for its effects.¹ Even so, growth would have been faster if the living standards of the masses

in the South had risen more rapidly.² The damage was done by the choices made by the ruling classes and conservative majorities in certain central countries, and especially by the choices made in the dominant economy, the USA. They resolved to break what little growth was left by making their wage-earners pay for the crisis and by wrecking the international credit system.

If there is any hope of 'economic recovery' in the old industrial countries, and in Europe in particular, it lies in co-operation with the South, and not in driving out the new competitors who have emerged from the old periphery. The fetters on mass purchasing power in the Third World have increasingly become the constraints on wage bargaining power in the Centre. The only agents who have an absolute interest in perpetuating nineteenth-century conditions of exploitation in the countries of bloody Taylorization, apart from remnant local oligarchies, are firms which have relocated the most labour-intensive segments of their production processes. Starvation wages and near slavery cannot provide a market for world output, but undercut wage levels in central Fordism and restrict metropolitan demand as a secondary consequence. In the absence of a selective protectionism based on compliance with minimal standards of social welfare and trade-union rights, the countries of the centre reward the dominant classes of the Third World and their multinational allies who most excel in repression and super-exploitation. Under these conditions 'free trade' means bringing world norms of exploitation into line with the norms of the most underprivileged sectors of the global proletariat.

Although there is a grain of truth in the old argument that the superexploitation of Third World labour does result in cheaper consumer goods and food products for the workers of the advanced capitalist societies, this is far less significant than the manifold ways in which the pillage of immiserated labour-power in the South is used to bludgeon the workers of the North. A clear declaration, preferably at the European level, to the effect that exports will no longer be accepted from countries which do not respect the human rights of labour would not only prevent some old industries from being relocated on the periphery, but would also put

pressure on authoritarian regimes to choose between improving the living standards of 'their' working masses and being excluded from their major export markets. Conversely, joint development agreements with Third World countries which respected international labour conventions (as established, for instance, by the ILO) would allow all parties to benefit from the industrialization of the periphery. But that presupposes a general moratorium and cancellation of a large part of the Third World's debt.

We should not expect miracles. Plans for 'world Keynesianism' (as in the more recent version of the Brandt Report) or 'a Marshall Plan for the Third World' would come up against the general constraints of the crisis of central Fordism. Moreover we should not romanticize Fordism in its metropolitan heydays. The boom of the 1960s was scarcely paradise, and youth and large sections of the less skilled working class dramatically rejected the social implications of the Fordist model well before it had begun to run out of economic steam. The acid rains came to remind us that ecological debts contracted by reckless, unplanned accumulation must, sooner or later, be reimbursed with interest. Indeed, anyone who has experienced the living nightmare of Cubatão (São Paulo's port and industrial satellite) knows that peripheral Fordism carries with it an ecological debt that is still graver and harder to cure than the financial debt.

In discussing options that might allow peripheral Fordism to move towards new variants of social democracy, I do not at all intend to suggest that a Third World repetition of the North's road to developed Fordism is the only, or the best, solution for the world as a whole. That road is, in any case, probably not open for the 'least advanced countries', or for the overwhelming majority of 'intermediate economies'. I merely wish to underline the responsibility of the centre for the harsh conditions of exploitation and the economic blockages encountered by the 'new industrial countries'. It is possible to reject this model of development, in the name of social, cultural or ecological arguments. That is up to the peoples in question to decide. But the policy now being pursued by the central governments and international agencies effectively shunts the growth of new peripheral

industries onto the most predatory, exploitative and degrading tracks.

International solidarity with the peoples of the Third World must involve a struggle against everything which blocks their national growth – even in a Fordist-capitalist sense – or which steers it to barbaric forms of primitive Taylorization. At the same time an attempt must be made, in equality and partnership, to find progressive exits from the crisis of Fordism, at the technological level as well as in social relations. For the proposals to 'adapt' technology will be rejected – often wrongly, it should be said – if they appear as modernist surrogates handed down with condescension to countries incapable of paying the price of 'real' modernity. The search will continue for new productive forms which, in North and South alike, break from alienation vis-à-vis the machine, and for new forms of collective organization that break with the tyranny of competition. In this common endeavour, starting from different situations, the workers of North and South, progressive economists, sociologists and technicians may carry the world towards a more just and humane future.

A necessary first step will be to overcome that apologetic discourse, unfortunately shared by Marxists like Arghiri Emmanuel and Bill Warren, which sees the 'progress' of capital across the globe, whatever its social and cultural cost, as the motor of technological 'progress' and the necessary route to the 'unification of humanity' and socialism.

As we have seen, the deformed development of market and wage relations in the Third World – from primitive Taylorization to peripheral Fordism – does not point inevitably to a radiant future. But even if it did, what right would anyone have to forbid dominated peoples and exploited classes to rebel while they are awaiting this glorious tomorrow? For the liberal discourse of a Rostow and the Marxist discourse of a Warren both lead to the *political* conclusion that 'populist' attempts to resist imperialism and mis-development are either 'inappropriate' or 'ineffective', a mere barrier to the development of the productive forces that capitalism is called upon to assure. It would be 'moralism' to condemn this growth model in the name of

the injustices and human agony that it brings in its wake. True scientists can have but one aim: the growth of the productive forces, and the 'unification of humanity'! From such noble heights how petty must seem the struggles of workers and peasants, how trivial the rebellion of women in the home, the factory or the realm of prostitution! And how astonishing it must seem that such a powerful mind as Karl Marx's should have wasted time organizing the nascent workers' movement, and in supporting the Irish national liberation movement even against the English labour organizations.

And yet, those who believe in capitalist horror as the mid-wife of socialism can justly lay claim to one aspect of Marx's work (his veritable fascination with the historical march of capitalism 'through blood and filth') and, above all, to Marx's descendants. I am referring to that mechanistic, economist, productivist and ultimately cynical Marxism of the Second and Third Internationals which still sees the 'development of the productive forces' as the index of historical progress. For that Marxism, flesh-and-blood generations are but sacrificial lambs to the God of Progress, in the name of a heavenly future to which our valley of tears will eventually lead. This vision represents no more than an internalization by the workers' movement of the positivist myths of the nineteenth-century Euro-centrist bourgeoisie. Every revolutionary practice – from Lenin through Gramsci (who hailed the 'revolution against *Capital*') to Mao Zedong – has had to break with this 'left' version of productivist mythology, which has been used to justify all the social-democratic capitulations, and all the abominations of Stalinism.

This is what people have in mind when they talk of a 'crisis of Marxism'. The disgust which it arouses has turned a growing number of workers, feminists and ecologists away from any reference to Marxism, both in the East and the West. In many parts of the Third World (e.g., Iran and Egypt) the identification of such Marxism with the bourgeois project of unconditional industrialization has deflected the masses and revolutionary intellectuals from Marxism and other secular ideologies, shifting their revolt towards reactionary clericalist ideologies.

To reconstruct the idea of progress, to weigh the cultural, ecological and social costs and advantages of what is presented as 'progress' – this is without doubt one of the chief responsibilities facing intellectuals in both North and South. It is certainly not up to Northern intellectuals to impose a new dogma that simply inverts the old progressivist-productivist credo. But nor is it the task of their Southern counterparts to blame all their country's difficulties on the ravages of technological, financial or cultural 'dependence'. I hope to have shown that no external destiny, no general law of capitalism dictates a nation's place within an ineluctable division of labour – unless, of course, one means by 'external destiny' the weight of the past inscribed in the social structure; unless one means the internalization of norms from a model of development which, having appeared to succeed elsewhere, has entered into crisis while leaving the ecological bill to be paid. In this sense, the only 'coercive law' is deliberate acceptance of the rules of free trade, of the free play of market forces. For, even though it be 'on the basis of given conditions inherited from the past', it is still people who make their own history.