

Gérard Pierre-Charles

THIRD WORLD REVOLUTIONS IN THE WORLD SETTING

Our twentieth century, now about to end, has seen the rise and fall of empires while the great majority of peoples remain oppressed. However it has also seen various processes of liberation in these weaker nations, which fight for their rights of self-determination and for opportunities to grow without the domination of super-powers. Seen in this light, the 20th century has shown how peoples of America, Asia, Africa and Central Europe have struggled with determination to free themselves of their local oligarchies, generally allied with the interests of transnational capitalism. In spite of the great variety of cultures and particular histories of each of these processes, it is possible to point out some general characteristics of recent "Third World" revolutions. In this article, Gérard Pierre-Charles, active defender of human rights in his native Haiti, analyzes the fundamental problems and foresees possible paths of development for these nations in the next century.

Ever since the "Third World" became a geo-political and historical phenomenon, the problems of social change which arise in any of these countries acquire a universal dimension, and set off powerful international forces - even if the changes are occurring in the smallest and least populated of these third world nations.

This is due to the fact that historically, and still today, third world countries have constituted territories of influence, of dominance, of plunder and of accumulation for world capitalism in its various liberal, monopolistic and transnational versions. For this reason, any attempt by a country in the region to opt for social revolution and self-determination, is seen by the countries of central capitalism as a weakening of its zone of control or influence. And so this attempt is considered a dangerous and adverse affair which must be combatted with maximum rigor and efficacy.

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The Historical Contradiction: Domination-Dependence

This vision of historical evolution is not really a consequence of the world polarity between capitalism and socialism, between west and east, as has been repeatedly affirmed in a systematic disinformation campaign organized to serve the interests of international capital. But this vision constitutes the guide to the behaviour of western nations since the Conquest and the subsequent colonial dominance. The bipolarity was expressed then in terms of "barbarie" and "civilization", of metropolis and colonies.

Resistance by subdued indians and enslaved blacks led to use of the most violent repressive actions by colonizers. Only one philosophy becomes evident from the massacres perpetrated by the Spanish in Peru against Tupac Amaru's rebellion, or by the British in India, or from the destructiveness of French or Portuguese conquerors in Africa: the ethic of capital in defense of its interests. This existed long before the antithesis of this system, socialism, could represent any threat to its survival.



President Fidel Castro led this torchlight march in Havana.
 Photo by Luis Humberto González

The main philosophy of interventionism is clearly manifest in Latin America where the nation state was constituted from the beginning of the 19th century and where the ideology of the Conquest, as well as that of the defense of sovereignty, became a powerful expression of national cohesion. The Haitian revolution against slavery (1791-1804), which ended with independence, not only led to an aggressive reply from Napoleonic France, but also to a systematic trade embargo, historic hostility and ex-communication by the part of colonial powers against the young black Republic. The Cuban revolution for independence (1895-1898), provoked a U.S. military intervention in order to protect the "ripe fruit" (in John Quincy Adams' famous phrase), as the United States could not tolerate the Cubans exercising self determination. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 also suffered the intervention of the U.S. and England due to the important interests and investments made in Mexico by those countries.

While capitalism, as an international system, gradually integrated more and more of the world space into its processes of accumulation, the contradiction between colonial and ex-colonial countries and those of central capitalism reproduced and renewed itself, and became modernized according to the evolution of contemporary capitalism. This last knew how to create powerful means of domination, of control and of articulation, which act in economic, political, military and ideological spheres. This highly perfected apparatus operates in a particularly efficacious way in the context of the transnationalization of information and disinformation, as instruments of psychological warfare created by world imperialism. In this situation, the mass media can present any expression of inconformity or questioning of the system by peoples of the third world as a subversion of the established order, promoted by socialist countries, especially the USSR, China, or Cuba.

Resistance by the conquered indians and enslaved blacks led to the use of the most violent repressive actions by colonizers

The Era of Revolutions in the Third World

After the Second World War, as the consciousness and rage of dominated peoples was growing, the social and ideological conservatism of capitalist nations became more and more evident.

Even in countries such as France and Italy, which had the most combative communist Parties, the most dissident intellectuals, the most aware workers and the most advanced electorates, the class struggle, which was apparently being defined, in Gramsci's terms as a "war of positions" against capitalism, began to lose ground during the 60's and 70's.

The historical logic of domination-dependence lent the revolutions of China and Vietnam a frankly anti-imperialist character, associating them closely with the problems of the Third World

In fact, the changes in the structure of the planetary economy, the social advantages enjoyed by the populations of developed capitalist countries due to transnationalization and accumulation on a world level, the efficiency of the ideological struggle by the mass media in the service of capitalism, and the objective difficulties and mistakes made by real socialism, were so many other elements which contributed to feed the conservatism of these opulent societies and to accomplish that the most conscious proletarian sectors would lose their revolutionary vision and energy.

In this context another tendency of the historical evolution was made more evident: the proletarian revolution predicted by Karl Marx did not occur in a central country such as Germany, but in a region at that time on the capitalist periphery, in the back-ward and - as Lenin himself called it - "barbaric" Russia.

The Chinese Revolution was, both objectively and subjectively, a revolution of the third world, although due to historical circumstances and its own self definition, it would be identified with socialist revolutions and thus widened and fortified the world socialist system. The same happened with the Vietnamese Revolution, which became a prototype of revolutions of oppressed nations, even though its beginning was situated in a period when relations between the third world and socialism had not been clearly defined - nor for that matter, had they been defined in the conceptual and geo-political spheres, between the third world and capitalism.

In both cases, China and Vietnam, the dynamics of class struggle meant that revolutionary processes would not be carried out in the orthodox European way outlined by Marx; besides, the historical logic of domination-dependence lent these revolutions a frankly anti-imperialist character, associating them closely with the problems of the third world.

Consequently, when the Cuban and Argelian Revolutions triumphed at the beginning of the 1960's, with their anti-imperialist content and ideology, they were seen as revolutions of the third world *par excellence*. Their insurrectional character, their nationalist, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist discourse, and the fact that they took up positions alongside the "non-aligned" states, provoked panic in the world capitalist power centers and at the same time, an overwhelming enthusiasm in the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The anti-system character of these revolutions and the threat they represented to established world order was due to their work and their project. They did indeed nationalize the economic interests of the metropolis and socialized the industries which belonged to them; they caused particular concern to the West because they represented an alternative society in a context where peoples of the emerging third world demanded national and social emancipation from neo-colonial formulas which France, England, Belgium and Holland tried to construct in order to conserve their system of dominance at any price.

Certainly the "model" which these triumphant revolutions first represented, was not able to reproduce itself in other regions for various reasons (specific local and national realities, and efficacy in contra-insurgent actions, especially in the 1960's).

However, their very presence on the world scene, the success they had and the set-backs they suffered, their influence, solidarity and the expectations they caused, had undeniable repercussions on the evolution of international relations.

These revolutions, and the Cuban Revolution in particular, made extraordinary contributions to the world revolutionary process, in historical and conceptual terms: they enriched and inspired an entire current of thought and action; they brought a breath of fresh air, as well as innovative ideas and critical data, to Marxism-Leninism, thus constituting the original contribution of third world peoples to the theory and practice of the liberating revolution.

After the Second World War, as the consciousness and rage of dominated peoples was growing, the social and ideological conservatism of capitalist nations became more and more evident

From Guinea-Bissau to Mozambique, from Angola to Ethiopia, from Southern Yemen to Libya, from South Vietnam to Afghanistan, from Cuba to Chile of the Popular Unity, from Grenada to Nicaragua, the historical richness of the various revolutionary paths has been unpredictable. Those revolutions have shown that, contrary to any Eurocentric dogma, the "motor of history" of oppressed peoples was not necessarily the class struggle, while the "small motor which activates the big motor" (Che Guevara) was not necessarily the working class, but the political-military struggle of a vanguard along with a national mobilization against the oppressor State, against imperialism and against its allies in the local oligarchies.

All these experiences of social revolution in the third world were seen to be terribly difficult and they had to

confront multiple forms of imperialist interventionist actions. Each bit of territory won was gained only after a hard fight.

In all the concrete situations, and not only in the phase of taking power, but also during the entire process of national construction and the erection of economic bases of the new society and of the fundamental institutions of a democracy based on the majority, these nations had to confront imperialism's most determined hostility. The imperialists used powerful transnational forces, the most sophisticated military means, unlimited financial resources and the entire capacity of manipulation at a world level, made possible by the mass media, to counter-arrest revolutionary projects of national sovereignty.

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New Obstacles and New Challenges

The example of Nicaragua is the most illustrative example of the difficult equation that third world peoples have to resolve in the context of any revolutionary process. In fact, ever since the Sandinists triumphed in 1979, the manoeuvres of the counter-revolution, and the undeclared war waged against this country by the U.S.A., have forced them to dedicate enormous resources - around half the national budget - to the defense of their sovereignty and survival as a free nation. Consequently it was impossible to carry out fully most of the development plans, and some material achievements made in the early days of the Revolution have been lost. Given Reagan's systematic policy of reducing living standards, and his determination to oblige this rebel nation to submit, the economic and social costs of survival have been extremely high.

But long before Nicaragua, the cases of China, Grenada and Angola had shown how "the essential question of all revolutions, that is, the taking and maintenance of power", involves objective problems and conditions which revolutionary vanguards and third world peoples struggling for their liberation, have to resolve, taking into account the realities of the world we live in.

One of these realities is that imperialism does not hesitate about the means it will resort to in order to destroy revolutionary processes in the third world - be this the government of Maurice Bishop in the tiny island state of Grenada, which measures 300 square kilometers and has only 100,000 inhabitants, or that of Salvador Allende, a

legitimate government formed after free elections in a country such as Chile - famous at world level for its democratic traditions. In the battle to achieve its objectives, imperialism employs the most illegitimate means of direct intervention, or indirect action through the "contras" in Nicaragua, or mercenaries in Angola, or uses the services of the South African regime, of counter-insurgency, of clandestine operations, of sabotage, of "low intensity warfare", etc., offering unlimited resources to the most backward local forces.

When they do not manage to overthrow revolutionary regimes, the imperialist forces weaken and ruin their economic bases with the aim of discrediting them and making their failure evident. After this, the liberal press and certain social-democrat sectors use the high social cost of the revolutions as an argument to justify the idea of "useless combat". As if nations which are not involved in a process of radical transformation do not have to pay the price of eternal prolongation of oppression: but, for the third world countries in revolutionary processes, the social cost is most terrible when it is measured in terms of premature deaths, malnutrition, lack of medical care, without even a light of hope at the end of the tunnel.

The search for national or international legitimacy comes as a complement and support to the war of violence and the psychological war, which at times, according to the case, is carried out with absolute disrespect for international norms and principles. We have seen, for example, that the U.S. Army intervened in Grenada on the pretext that this small nation of black rebels was constructing an airport which constituted a threat for the "national security of the United States". The government of that country also ignored the judgement of the International Court in the Hague, which condemned U.S. intervention in the Republic of Nicaragua through armed operations carried out by the "contras". We have also seen the very respectable Congress of the U.S.A. openly discuss whether they should or should not give federal funds to support an interventionist operation against an established government.

In the current phase of the crisis of the system of imperialist domination in the world, we can observe an increasing consciousness of peoples against that dominance. Thus, just as one could see with Reagan's policies, the forces of transnational capital are ready to break the institutional framework of legitimacy which they themselves helped build when their hegemony was total.

The imperialists use powerful transnational forces, unlimited financial resources and their great capacity to manipulate information, to counter-arrest nationalist revolutionary projects



Slogan in Havana. Photo by Luis Humberto González

It is important to point out the following policies which count among the new elements of capitalist behavior:

a) disrespect towards certain institutions which represent that legitimacy (such as the UNESCO, and the International Labor Organization - ILO), and towards norms and principles which nevertheless constitute the achievements of a more equitable international order which were won in a combined struggle on the level of international law by some socialist countries and some third world nations such as those which practise the principles of non-intervention and self-determination;

b) the use of economic, technological, trade and financial embargoes, which have been employed very efficaciously since the Cuban Revolution, and have been applied in diverse modalities against the majority of third world nations involved in processes of national liberation;

c) the use of the foreign debt as an instrument of pressure and blackmail by the most powerful banks of capitalist nations and by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), thanks to which they can end all will to change or to rectify the relations of dominance-dependence.

The existing rules of the game contribute to define the particularly complex conditions in which the struggle for sovereignty and social revolution is being developed. Besides these limitations there are other difficulties inherent in the very act of economic transformation, in the

historic context created by the structural dependence, the instability in prices of raw materials, the accumulation of interests on the debt, the lack of capital resources and of skilled labor, technological backwardness, etc.

Even though the changes impulsed by the revolution are very important, the weight of the past and the power of international links will continue to obstruct for a long time yet the real exercise of full sovereignty and the realization of profound changes in living conditions of the majorities in our countries, subjected for centuries to a low level of development of productive forces and to the tutelage of oppressive forces, be these local ones or of colonial capitalism. To these problems we must add the burden of the real consumer necessities of the populations, as well as the models of consumerism propagated by the privileged sectors and the middle classes.

Cooperation with Socialist Countries

Faced with the challenges involved in social change and in gaining authentic sovereignty, third world countries in revolutionary processes had to develop international relations which would be able to provide alternative resources and diminish the pressures and the burden of conditions imposed by the old metropolis and its allies. They looked to the socialist world for credits, technology, formation of technical crews and for more equitable trade relations.

These efforts to give a new orientation to international economic relations so as to diversify them and to reduce, if not break the dependence patterns, were particularly important in third world countries from 1960 onwards, especially in Asia and Africa. Many newly independent nations which proclaimed "African socialism", such as Ghana, Mali, Guinea and Tanzania, oriented their exchanges towards that unknown world which offered new markets for their tropical produce and new sources of technological supplies.

Since 1960, as a consequence of trade embargoes and pressures exercised by the U.S.A. on the one hand, and on the other, because of its political choice in favor of scientific socialism, Cuba developed all its economic exchanges with the U.S.S.R. and other socialist countries. This new orientation implied fundamental technological changes in productive systems and equipment, and in economic and financial transactions. Thanks to the granting of considerable credit, to technical advice on all levels, and to the formation of thousands of working units, the Cuban economy was able to effect the transformation and lay the grounds for a new socialist society.

The qualitative process of economic change was particularly successful in the decade of the 70's, even though Cuba had to face constant difficulties due to structural and institutional adjustments which the transformation demanded, and to the radical turn in its international relations, along with the need to dedicate enormous resources to defense.

When they do not manage to overthrow revolutionary regimes, the imperialist forces weaken and ruin their economic bases with the aim of discrediting them

There have been other successful experiences of economic cooperation between the U.S.S.R., the German Democratic Republic and other developed socialist countries, and various countries in processes of revolutionary change, such as Vietnam, Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique. Although we lack full knowledge about the balance of these experiences, both generally and specifically, we can say that this cooperation presents fundamentally different characteristics when compared with economic relations between the central capitalist nations and their dominated periphery.

This difference is essential if we want to understand the dynamics of trilateral relations between developed capitalist countries, the countries of the dependent and underdeveloped third world and the socialist countries.

It is clear that the phenomenon of accumulation at the world level is fundamental in all relations between central

capitalism and the peripheral capitalism of third world countries.

This process, which constitutes the key to the prodigious development of capitalism in the central nations, has been clearly explained with reference to the recent period of transnationalization by various intellectuals from Latin American and other third world countries, and particularly by the Egyptian economist Samir Amín.

These investigations show that imperialism, at all its levels, from the center of the pyramid up to the top, attracts resources from the periphery in a particularly efficient way, and uses for this, channels of unequal international commercial exchange, the fall in prices of raw materials, the employment of cheap labor in poor nations, the multiplication of dividends of transnational companies, and the flow of interest payments on loans given on the hardest conditions.

Although the foreign debt has recently acquired great importance in the consciousness of nations, and third world countries have become more aware of exploitation techniques used in the name of the debt, we must point out that this is not a new mechanism, and that it is only one of the multiple instruments of accumulation of capital employed by the central nations to use the resources of the periphery to their advantage.

If we correctly evaluate the dimension of the phenomenon of accumulation of capital on a world level, and its role in the reproduction and extension of the mode of capitalist production, it is possible to understand why the great developed countries of the world are able to base their opulence and power on the simultaneous exploitation of the peoples and resources of the third world. In addition there are sources of internal accumulation with guaranteed high levels of productivity.

Meanwhile, the socialist countries, due to their origins, their essence, and the nature of their economic relations with countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, do not benefit from the process of accumulation at a world level. On the contrary, because of certain backwardness in relation to capitalism, they contribute in some way to this phenomenon of accumulation used to the advantage of the capitalist nations, through the purchase of technology and of certain agricultural or industrial products.

This reality of the world economy has not been sufficiently studied. However, its incidence in the parallel evolution of both systems is considerable. It also influences the capacity of socialist countries to help revolutions in the third world. Hypothetically we can conjecture that the most advanced socialist nations, which had to contend with the demands of the arms race, with the needs of reproduction and technological innovation in the framework of "peaceful competitiveness", and with the demands of socialist planning and distribution, only had a few resources - be these capital, labor or infra-structure - to help satisfy the immense requirements of third world revolutions.

This kind of cooperation was extremely important and efficient and made possible the economic growth of some countries, and even meant the survival of some revolu-

tionary processes. It was decisive on military levels in cases such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia, and helped maintain the integrity of these nations.

In many spheres, that aid is based on a sense of solidarity and even of sacrifice which exists among socialist countries and among those nations oppressed by neo-colonialism and the power of transnational companies. However, the objective limitations of this aid in the field of credits and certain technologies, are also real facts in the contemporary world system in the face of attempts to make revolutionary transformations in the third world.

Lessons and Perspectives

The experiences of 40 years' struggle in power by numerous peoples in processes of social change, busy in the construction of "new societies", represent a fundamental contribution to this task of universal dimensions. Consciously or not, today or inevitably tomorrow, millions of men and women of the planet who want to end all hunger, dependence and under-development, are committed to this struggle.

Whatever their source of ideological and political inspiration, this project responds to social and political imperatives, to the need to survive and to legitimate aspirations which come from the will to end the enormous differences that exist between peoples who enjoy the superfluous and those who lack almost everything.

This project is for the future, but it cannot help but look towards the experiences of the past. The historical memory of third world peoples is a patrimony which should be reconstituted, cultivated and analyzed in function of the conditions of each one of those experiences in space and time. This and the exchange of knowledge involved, will contribute to assure the progress of these peoples towards their liberation and well-being.

The foreign debt is used as an instrument of pressure and blackmail by the most powerful banks of the capitalist nations and by institutions such as the IMF

It is our task to elaborate the sociologies of revolutions which occurred in the last few decades in Africa, Asia and Latin America; we should learn about the political economy of each of these experiences of national construction, and deepen our knowledge of the political culture and the ideology which led to these revolutions.

Keeping in mind that each of the experiences we have mentioned is an expression of very complex social and historical processes, and without wanting to simplify the phenomena, we can point out the following characteristics that these processes have in common:

a) They are national revolutions where the anti-colonial and-or anti-imperialist ideology adopts historic cultural local expressions (Muslim nationalism in Algeria, Fidel Castro-ism, Sandinism, national liberation in Angola and Mozambique) and which evolved towards forms of state intervention and of socialism adapted to specific situations.

b) These historical movements transformed the state which existed beforehand in the form of a directly colonial institution or representing capitalist interests, into a new political arrangement which contributed to the creation of the nation-state and the state-people. In this way, the Army in the first place as well as the judicial, administrative and ideological apparatus, came to participate in the political and social revolution.

The revolutions of the Third World effectively achieved decolonialization, liberation and national sovereignty

c) These revolutions arose from and were directed by a political organization which represented the demands of the majorities.

According to the case, the said organization was a revolutionary party, a liberation front or a patriotic democratic movement; what they held in common was the fact that they constituted an organized structure with a strong national-revolutionary ideological content and with a leadership based on heroism and identified with the most general demands of the people.

d) These revolutions effectively achieved decolonialization, liberation and construction of national sovereignty, which had an international manifestation in "non-alignment" or in political alliances with the socialist countries.

e) On the economic front, together with the construction of material bases for the new societies, real changes were made in the organization of production, modification of property ownership, distribution of wealth, as well as in the models of consumerism and in international economic relations.

f) The revolutions installed more socially representative and more democratic political regimes than had existed in the pre-revolutionary past. The new concept of democracy has expression in the participation of the majority social sectors and classes in decision making and in the installation and functioning of an authentically popular government.

g) In third world countries, the revolution implies that the vanguard elaborates a theory of the ways and means for taking and conserving power and for social transformation. This theory is inspired by, or at least takes into

There have been successful experiences of economic cooperation between developed socialist countries and nations in processes of revolutionary changes, such as Vietnam, Ethiopia and Cuba.

account, Marxist-Leninist thinking, as well as national humanist and progressive ideologies.

The theory is also closely related to local experiences of social struggle, and to the social-political realities of each country and to other contingencies of geographical or historical nature, which allow the expression of the creative capacities of the people and of the vanguard movement.

h) On the basis of local social-economic and political-cultural realities, it was possible to draw up a strategy of development based - among other things - on:

1) An autonomous social organization with its own forces and which grows according to the real development and levels of local capital and technology on the one hand, and the capacity for production of goods and services necessary for the functioning of the national economy, on the other.

2) The use of human and natural resources, as well as the transformation of consumer models, following a national economic rationale which establishes priorities.

3) The creation of a new system of international relations following the break with the system of world capitalism's transnational companies, as a consequence of the inevitable trade embargo or due to a deliberate decision.

These proposals and lessons, fruits of experience of a difficult national grass-roots transformation in the third world, show how much the revolution in these kinds of contexts, constitute a challenge to the inventive capacity of oppressed peoples, and calls not only for the defense of the right to life and to the prodigious impulse to survive of millions of men and women, but also on the long frustrated will and historic capacity of this part of humanity. ■



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