



Samir: Leading Intellectual of the South

Professor Samir Amin is arguably the leading intellectual of the Global South over the last 50-60 years. In my opinion, no other intellectual has articulated so forcefully and so consistently the call for the political, economic and intellectual emancipation of the South as he did. His early involvement in anti-colonialist struggles and his encounter with Marxism have had a profound influence on his intellectual development.

Early Revolutionary Engagement

It is in High School that he joined the struggle against British colonial-

Demba Moussa Dembélé
ARCADE
Senegal

ism. It was also in High School that he discovered Marxism and became a member of the Egyptian Communist Party. When he went to the University in Paris, he found a context that stimulated and strengthened his ideological and political convictions. It was the end of World War II, with the French Communist Party enjoying a great prestige and influence, for the role it played in the anti-Nazi resistance during the War.

It was also a period of growing anti-colonialist sentiments in students' associations from French colonies in Africa and Indochina. Naturally, he took part in these associations' activities and came to know some of their members who later became leaders of their countries at independence.

The 1950s and 1960s were periods of struggles against colonialism and imperialist domination in Africa and other parts of the Global South. Therefore, Samir Amin's ideas were in part shaped by those events, with pan-Africanist leaders, like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Gamal

Abdel Nasser and others, as well as liberation movements, who were attempting to free Africa from the yoke of Western domination and build autonomous economic systems. It is in that context that Samir Amin went to Mali, under its first President, Modibo Keita, to work in the Department of Economic Planning with other prominent French economists.

Challenge to Conventional Economics

In his economic work, he used the Marxist analysis of human societies to challenge conventional neoclassical economic conception of development and international economic relations. His entire intellectual endeavors were dedicated to deconstructing neoclassical economics; he often called “vulgar economics”. In this confrontation, he used originality, intuition, audacity and foresight. He was among the leading figures of the Dependency School of the 1960s and 1970s, which claims that development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin.

The Center-Periphery theory he propounded claims that there is one single world capitalist system in which the underdevelopment of the Periphery is a direct result of its exploitation by the Center. This explains unequal development in which unequal trade plays a major role.

Delinking

To break these unequal relations requires delinking from the global system. It is the only way for the South to develop, given the polarizing nature of the capitalist system. Delinking could pave the way for a sovereign national project, by gaining control over two key economic policies: foreign trade and capital flows. This would enable South

countries to use State intervention to gain control over key sectors, free themselves from externally-imposed economic policies and promote South-South trade relations.

With the deepening crisis of the globalized capitalist system, trade wars between major world powers, the growing rejection of neoliberal policies, even in Western countries, one can measure the audacity and far-sightedness of Professor Samir Amin when he argued for delinking 30 years ago.

The Long Road to Socialism

The deepening crisis of monopoly capitalism is translating into more hardship, wars of aggression, militarization and terrorism for the overwhelming majority of the world population. The world is even witnessing the rise of fascism in the United States, Brazil, among others. In Samir Amin’s view, these are signs that capitalism has exhausted its usefulness and has no future. Therefore, its demise is inevitable. This has been the conviction of Samir Amin ever since he encountered Marxism and experienced the “development of underdevelopment” in many countries of the South, especially in Africa. In reality, for him “capitalism is a parenthesis in history”, an assertion developed in his books, like *“Beyond Senile Capitalism”* (2002), *“From Capitalism to Civilization”* (2008), *“Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism in Crisis?”* (2009); *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism* (2012).

For him, the demise of capitalism should give way to socialism, “*the only possible, acceptable and humane answer to the horrors produced by capitalism*” (Intellectual Itinerary, 1993). However, Samir Amin cautions that there is a long road to socialism, in part because of

the fierce resistance to be expected from capitalist classes but also because it is not just another system of production and exchange but a higher stage of human civilization.

Professor Samir Amin’s Legacy

Original Marxist thinker, bold and far-sighted economist and dedicated revolutionary, Samir Amin has made invaluable contributions to our understanding of the nature of the capitalist system and its implications for Africa and the South. He also contributed to our understanding of the current world geopolitical configuration, with the importance of South-South cooperation in the struggle against the imperialist Triad, namely the United States, the European Union and Japan. As original Marxist thinker, he adopted a critical approach to classical Marxism and opposed Eurocentrism. This enabled him to integrate into Marxism the contributions from the great Revolutions and struggles for self-determination from the South.

As we mourn the passing away of such an intellectual giant, what comes to mind is how to preserve, develop and disseminate the immense legacy he left. The institutions he helped set up, like CODESRIA, Enda Third World, Third World Forum, World Forum for Alternatives, among others, have a great responsibility in this regard. Scholars and activists should learn about his example of dedicated intellectual and his contributions to struggle against capitalism, imperialist domination and for the emancipation of the South.

Professor Samir Amin is gone physically, but his invaluable intellectual and political contributions and unshakeable faith in the advent of socialism will continue to inspire our struggles.