

Samir Amin: A Symbol of Resistance

Samir Amin (1931-2018) will best be remembered as a radical Marxist Political Economist, a revolutionary who was unwavering and persistent in championing the cause of the downtrodden, exploited and oppressed 'popular masses' of the 'periphery' or 'Global South' and Third World. He is a symbol of resistance against imperialism and capitalism. A lucid writer who authored over 30 books during his lifetime, he advanced a mass of evidence to support his thesis that at the core of underdevelopment, deprivation, exploitation and oppression of the people of the South are forces of global capitalist accumulation. Driven by profit-seeking powerful corporations (or 'monopoly capital'), and sustained by the global dominance and military machine of the Triad (meaning the United States, Europe and Japan), Amin argued that capitalist accumulation has 'plundered' the resources of the Global South. He characterised this as 'accumulation by dispossession'. In Africa, this took the form of colonial and imperialistic extraction of minerals, oil, dispossession of local people of their land, and transnational domination of economies. The displacement and dislocation of people from their land particularly irked Amin, leading him to conclude that capitalism was becoming 'barbaric' as it 'imploded'. So pervasive is the system that, he urges: 'It is now more necessary than ever to substitute for it other logics of development with a superior rationality' (Amin, 2004: 34).

One of Samir Amin's greatest contributions to intellectual discourse and critical thinking was his con-

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ceptualisation of the complexity and contradictions of global capitalism and imperialism. He viewed capitalism as 'a global system, more than and different from a mere juxtaposition of societies at various stages of capitalist transformation' (Amin, 2006:2). He cautioned against a conceptualisation of imperialism simply as a stage of capitalism, viewing it instead, as 'a *permanent* feature of global expansion which always produced polarization of wealth and power in favour of the core countries'. The complexity of the system resides in the globality, interconnectedness and 'permanency' of the forces that drive it into global expansion. Its key contradiction consists in the self-destruction that is embedded in any polarizing system. Part of the complexity of the system is how it is sustained by the superior military power and technological advances of the Triad and also how the North controls many of the ruling elites in the Global South by the North, thus ensuring their cooperation, co-optation and collusion on policies that best serve the interests of global capital; This perpetuates the 'unequal exchange' which he wrote about extensively. Permanency of the system is guaranteed through neoliberal policies that perpetuate unequal exchange and ensure that Africa and the Global South remain as commodity producers and importers of Northern manufactured goods. Amin argues

that it was the neoliberal market policies of the IMF and World Bank-supported Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that destroyed industry, thus maintaining the unequal exchange between the North and South which was so central to capitalist accumulation.

The implications of Amin's conceptualization of global capitalism as highlighted above, are far-reaching. Dismantling what he termed as '*the empire of chaos*', also becomes a complex struggle. Nonetheless, Amin believed that it is possible to win it. Amin was in favour of a global socialist alternative, which he referred to as 'a new form of socialism' that is 'distinctly different from the collapsed communism and socialism of former Soviet Union'. He had a vision of a new global system that is based on a form of 'market socialism', which he defined in the following way:

In this perspective, we may conceive of a 'market socialism' that combines democratic regulation of the market with methods of planning that are themselves the result of democratic debate rather than technocratic command (Amin, 2006:179).

Amin explained that the global socialist alternative should be founded on fundamental principles of democratisation, social progress, solidarity and cooperation among the people of the South within the context of a pluricentric world. He was sceptical of the Western conceptualisation of democracy, which he regarded as divorced from social progress. In his opin-



ion, democratisation should manifest itself through social progress of the 'popular masses'. The new alternative required mobilisation of trade unions, farmers, peasants and civil society, among others, to challenge and fight the repressive/oppressive system of domination. Amin emphasized the need for cooperation and solidarity among countries of the Global South and the Third World. Experiences such as Bandung (1955-73) and the World Social Forum were cause for optimism that the South could unite in their quest for an alternative.

The 'new global socialist alternative' has a number of unanswered questions though. Exactly what is

or what should be the nature of resistance? How should that struggle be forged? Who drives it? How? If attained, what safeguards must it have in order to prevent the *exploitation, repression and oppression* that also characterized imperialism and capitalism? What safeguards will 'new global socialism' have to prevent the *autocratic rule, corruption and inefficiency* that was witnessed in the collapsed former Soviet empire? and indeed, in many countries around the world?

Samir Amin may not have provided answers to all these questions but he has offered a compelling critique of global capitalism and imperialism. It is now left to the present generation and those to come,

to shape an alternative paradigm for the future.

References

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