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Reassessment of Underdevelopment

by Marion Mushkat, Tel Aviv *

Colonialism, neo-colonialism, Imperialism are vocabularies often heard in connection with underdevelopment. It seems to be necessary to analyse their theoretical economic and political implications and the consequences for the practice.¹

Pan-African Congresses emphasized human roles, racial equality, justice and improved working conditions, and tried to formulate "continental socialism" tied to national and religious concepts; consequently the Soviets and other Communist nations described African Socialism as an expression of petty-bourgeois attitudes. The Soviets and their satellites also criticized similar tendencies on other continents as being isolationist, continental-racial denigrative of the Asian Soviet Republics, and totally apart from Marxist-Leninism.

This criticism increased after World War II, when the socialism of colonial or semi-colonial peoples was directed toward achieving political freedom; such socialism became an instrument of local nationalism for strengthening independence and development. It kept increasing during the late 1950's as the new sovereign states multiplied incessantly; they declared their own brands of socialism, completely different from scientific Marxism and clearly adapted to their own needs.

The Soviets' Principles

The Soviets eventually adopted the principle of differing paths to socialism — not just in Africa, Asia and South America, but also in Europe. As a result, the USSR reappraised the term "revolutionary democracy" and stressed the need for greater co-operation with "democratic and revolutionary nationalism" in all fields. Soviet leaders began pointing out the achievements of noncapitalistic

developments in Africa and elsewhere. This was followed by signs of change in the position of their theoreticians; they tended to see some changes in the less-developed countries (LDCs) (especially those changes accompanied by declaration of socialist aims) as examples of peaceful transformation to a non-capitalistic society. It was generally thought that the rule in most of the new Asian and African states expressed not only national bourgeois interests, but also anti-imperialist and clear socialist tendencies. These states included e.g. Burma, Indonesia (prior to the suppression of the Communist Movement in 1965), Egypt, Algeria (before Ben-Bella's fall in 1965), Ghana (prior to the February 1966 revolt), and some Latin American states. Obviously this change in the Soviet position was a result of pragmatism.

However, non-Soviet Marxists usually blame the limited prospects for basic socialist change in Africa and other LDCs on the continuation of pre-capitalistic social and economic structures, and on a lack of incentives and other objective conditions for growth. If capital is accumulated, they say, it causes the formation of a worker's class and of labour and managerial elites. While the capital is primarily in the hands of foreign investors in the beginning, this process does not change even if ownership later falls into the hands of the state. Yet economic growth actually curbs the engendering of basic reforms in the society, even resulting in degeneration if it is accompanied by a policy which denies the need for class differentiation². Proper changes in the mode

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¹ For more details on this posture, see M. Mushkat, *Der Afrikanische Sozialismus (African Socialism)*, in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1971.

² G. Arrighi and J. S. Saul, *Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa*, in: *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1968, pp. 144.

of production, followed by a class struggle, is considered by most non-Soviet Marxists to be the only path to modernization, independence and socialism.

Marxist and Non-Marxist Opinions

Soviet experts measure the progressiveness of a regime by its support for the USSR and the Soviets' foreign policies³. Non-Soviet Marxist writers, on the other hand, usually give primary consideration to the economic relationships⁴. This is the reason why the latter writers view the nominally socialist Third World states as being authoritarian structures on the way to capitalism, state-capitalism or bureaucratic nationalist-elitist rule, frequently with fascist or national-socialist tendencies⁵.

This last position seems to be based on a dogmatic interpretation or even misinterpretation of historical materialism. It is frequently a result of mechanically applying the European experience to the absolutely different situation of the former colonial territories. It therefore underestimates the efforts of some of the regimes to solve different social problems, and underrates the political activation of at least parts of the population.

Marx taught that history is made by men themselves according to the conditions of their lives; through their practices they change existing realities. This approach views the mode of production as the economic basis of society. However, the relationships shaped in the framework of production are equally important to the historical process. The mode of production and the social structure are not mechanical, one-sided factors; they are interacting and interdependent. Marx and Engels saw the mode of production as an inseparable part of both social and economic processes. This is why they never viewed slavery, feudalism, capitalism or the forthcoming socialism as uniform systems, growing mechanically and simultaneously throughout the world, divided from each other. On the contrary, they stressed the multifarious variations of all structures, their mutual penetration, their different shapes in different countries, and the coexistence of contradicting elements. They even opposed the recognition of pure socio-economic models, which they felt would lead to abstractions. Consequently, they denied the value of prescriptions suitable for all

types of societies in all times. They also opposed the concept of an economic basis taken separately from the political and legal superstructure.

However, this mutual, dialectical interdependence did not hinder Marx and Engels from underscoring the relative autonomy of the ideological and political factors, traditional frameworks, political parties, and the state machinery. They described the social classes both as objective units (*an sich*) and as forms of conscious activity for the sake of defending their specific interests (*für sich*) or, to use Lucacs's terminology, as instruments for reacting rationally to the conditions of their life and struggling for their change. This struggle was determined by the contradictions between the mode of production and the social relationships.

Historical materialism interpreted in this way requires the dismissal not only of the Soviet definitions of progressiveness but also of those based on the mode of production or on political activity exclusively. The latter case, which ignores the economic factor, is reflected in some of the concepts that follow the Maoist path⁶. A true Marxist approach to problems of change in the Third World must distinguish colonialism from imperialism, and assess them dialectically. It must consider the role of the traditional structures in promoting social change. It must take into consideration the new developments in world economy that strengthen the links between the industrial countries and make them increasingly indifferent to the needs of the less-developed countries.

Specific Features of Imperialism and Colonialism

The starting point of Soviet theory in regard to the colonial peoples has been Lenin's definition of imperialism. He identifies imperialism with colonialism, which he regarded as a certain stage in the development of the capitalist system — during which monopolistic and financial power crystallizes, the importance of capital export grows, the international trusts begin to penetrate the world economy, and the great powers distribute global influence among themselves. It is not surprising that this theory strongly appeals to the leaders of many LDCs, because it places the responsibility for their condition on former colonial nations.

Prominent Third World leaders often voice their apprehension of communist imperialism; its existence, by the way, has been affirmed by outstanding Marxist theoreticians, as well as by a number of statesmen and political scientists in popular democracies (albeit only after the start of de-Stalinization). Their claim is gaining ground nowadays with the disintegration of blocs, the call for polycentrism within the Communist bloc, the

³ R. Buss, Whither Arab Socialism? Problems of Communism, July-August 1972/XXI, p. 87.

⁴ See S. Zacher, Reflection on the Arab Disaster, in: New Outlook, No. 2, 1970, p. 16; Abdel Razak Abdel Kadar, La Paix Israël-Arabe, in: Centrale, No. 96, 1966, p. 123; B. Tibi (Ed.), Die Arabische Linke (The Arabian Left), Frankfurt/M., 1966, and S. Amin, The Maghreb in the Modern World, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Penguin Books 1970.

⁵ Cfr. A. J. Gregor, African Socialism, Socialism and Fascism, in: The Review of Politics, No. 3, 1967, p. 325.

⁶ See M. Hussain, La lutte des classes en Egypte, Paris, 1971.

demands for fundamental changes or even liquidation of both the Atlantic and the Warsaw Pact.

In addition, important Third World personalities do not overlook the dangers of "micro-imperialism" within their own ranks. These dangers are illustrated by Nasser's imperialistic designs, as well as the plans to create a "Greater Ghana", a "Greater Somali", a "Greater Israel", a "Greater Palestine", a "Greater India", etc. All these plans aim for the subjugation of various African and Asian peoples and states by other peoples and states of the same continents.

Therefore, imperialism should not be confused with colonialism; the latter is only a single expression of the former. Colonialism is not merely the conquest of a foreign territory; it exists when the conquerer explicitly or implicitly asserts its superiority over the conquered people. A colonial power imposes its will not only in the political and economic domain, but also in the social sphere through a policy of discrimination and segregation; sometimes it may even use measures liable to cause the annihilation of the conquered people.

It can be argued, therefore, that just as imperialistic conquest results chiefly in the loss of a people's political or economic independence, so colonialism results in the loss of human rights, thereby preventing both individual and racial-national progress.

Neo-Colonialism and Political Independence

Therefore, unless a distinction is made between imperialism and colonialism, it is difficult to understand the Third World's problems. The post-colonial and post-imperial countries are fearful of economic subjugation, which would turn their independence into a fiction. Neo-colonialism, which is an expression of economic imperialism, frightens the Third World states in spite of its dissimilarity to the cruel, classic colonialism. Neo-colonialism is strongly suggestive of the "dollar diplomacy" or "big stick" policies practiced by the USA in South America at the end of the last century and the beginning of the twentieth century. However, neo-colonialism does not resemble the imperialistic methods, which were characterized by a formal restriction of the international freedom of action⁷. Contradicting the opinion which seeks to connect neo-colonialism with the loss of political independence⁸, an attempt was actually made in the sixties to operate neo-colonialism as a tool in the "cold war"; its purpose

⁷ For more details on this aspect of the problem, see M. M u s h - k a t , On the Nature of Colonialism and of the State Nationalism in Produced in Africa, in: Co-Existence, pp. 162-65 (Vol. 6, No. 2, 1969).

⁸ M. P e r h a m , The Colonial Reckoning, p. 13, London 1963.

was to link the former colonies to the ex-metropolis (or to the powers that took their places) by means of political, military and economic arrangements.

The aforementioned Leninist definition of imperialism may contribute towards an understanding of a certain stage of the capitalist system in Europe at the turn of the last century. But it does not embrace early colonialism, nor is it helpful in understanding neo-colonialism. Neither does it apply to the new multinational corporations, which sometimes detach themselves from the governmental policies of the states in which they are registered⁹.

Problematic Studies of Imperialism

Some studies of imperialism, including those based on Marx and Engels, point out some positive aspects of world powers: they advance the disintegration of provincialism, national seclusions and outdated social and economic systems, and pave the way for all nations to draw closer in universality¹⁰.

Unfortunately, many studies of the distinctions between industrialized and less-developed countries are based exclusively on the mode of production; they ignore the specific features of colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism and new developments in the world economy — as well as the dual role (both negative and positive) of the European penetration into Third World areas. Consequently, they underestimate the effect of international political changes on the less-developed countries and the human factor as well — basing themselves on the aggregative Keynesian approach to development. However, Gunnar Myrdal¹¹ seems to be absolutely right in opposing this posture which attempts to solve only the problem of directing consumption and investments, while minimizing actions to improve living conditions until enough capital is accumulated.

Economics cannot be viewed apart from social considerations, conceived in purely economic or mathematical terms. Not surprisingly then, the application of these theories in the less-developed countries resulted in dismal failures. It was wrongly assumed that foreign technology and administrative systems could be implanted without regard to local capabilities, levels of education,

⁹ Cfr. Z. R a j h , Multinational Companies, in: The Review of International Affairs, p. 26 (Vol. XXIII, No. 534-35, July 1972).

¹⁰ Cfr. Sh. A v i n e r i , Marx and Modernization, in: The Review of Politics, p. 188, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1969.

¹¹ See G. M y r d a l , Asian Drama, An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations, 20th Century Fund, New York, 1948; and this author's The Challenge of World Poverty, Princeton, 1970. For a critique of the exclusively economic approach towards problems of development, see also A. H a n s e l b a c h , Mobilizing Support for Developmental Co-operation in Industrial Countries, Vienna Institute for Development (1968), pp. 3-4.

or indigenous structures. Historical experience has demonstrated that progress is not tied to economic factors alone.

Insufficiency of the Economic Approach

The insufficiency of the economic approach to the problems of the Third World is particularly illuminated by the manifold forms of "revolutionary" activities there. By and large they differ absolutely from class struggle; they are also frequently detached from any clear ideological concept, being rooted in the specific conditions of the various territories¹². The thesis that development is restrained by traditional social structures¹³ is an argument that usually accompanies the purely economic concept of the problem; it is more evidence of the approach's theoretical weakness and contradiction with reality. R. König's fixation with the idea that a cultural factor determines the morale of work — and that different cultures more or less diligent also prove the irrelevancy of a purely economic and technological assessment of the ways towards social progress¹⁴. J. Tinbergen, on the other hand, seems to pay proper attention to the values and psychodynamic processes in analyzing alternative ways of modernizing developing countries; he is an indisputable authority in this field as chairman of the development planning in the United Nations¹⁵.

Illusory Conception of the Third World

J. Galtung's structural theory of imperialism¹⁶ seems to be a very adequate approach to the problem. He defines imperialism as a special type of dominance of one collectivity (usually a nation) over another; the center of the imperialist nation establishes a bridgehead in the center of the dominated nation, tying the two centers together by means of a mutual interest. Through vertical interaction, the dominating nation enriches itself more than does the dominated nation. This explains how aggressive capitalism brought stagnation and other destructive results to the subjugated countries; the process is persuasively described by Pierre Bairoch¹⁷, who shares the position of Baran, Sweezy, Amin and other researchers. However, the internal causes of stagnation,

are almost completely ignored in this analysis. So is the fact that colonialism and imperialism *sui modo* were originally African, Asian and American shaped long before Europeans reached the overseas territories. Colonialism is usually described here as a product of external forces only¹⁸.

Samir Amin stresses that the dialectics between colonial policies and social formation, on the one hand, and modes of production internal to the regions, on the other, were a major factor in the history of underdevelopment in Black Africa. Amin points to the necessity of viewing African societies as dependent and peripheral shaped according to the needs of dominant capitalist societies¹⁹. This view seems to be an oversimplification of the problem — not only because it ignores the role of internal social and economic factors, but also because it is detached from the new economic and political developments in the industrialized countries.

Consequences for International Organisations

From this evolves the new danger confronting the Third World: to be abandoned before a solution is found for the evils inflicted upon it during the period of colonial and imperialist subjugation. This danger seems to me to be no less serious than is continued exploitation as in the past²⁰.

The Third World's leaders are aware of this danger. This is why they struggle for new links with industrialized countries through the UNCTAD, GATT and other specialized agencies inside and outside the UN, through the UN itself, and through other international organizations. They try to counteract the tendencies of the industrialized societies to minimize economic links with the less-developed countries. African, Asian, South American and even "socialist" countries press on the USA, West Germany, Japan and other industrialized countries — trying to get credits, customs preferences and export possibilities to strengthen the mutual economic dependence of the developed and less-developed societies. The problem of the Third World today is to cease its economic dependence on the developed nations. This dependence must be replaced by interdependence, changing the peripheral role into a partnership. At the beginning this will be possible only through the granting of special rights and privileges to the weaker parties.

¹² For an interesting analysis of this problem, see C. Legum, Africa's Contending Revolutions, Problems of Communism, March-April 1972, pp. 2.

¹³ See J. C. Froelich, Les Structures Sociales et le Développement, Geneve-Afrique, Acta Africana, Vol. VIII, No. 2, 1969, pp. 38, and A. Bodensiedt, Social Changes in Developing Countries, in: INTERECONOMICS, No. 6/1972, p. 173.

¹⁴ For more details on this view see I.a. R. König, Aspekte der Entwicklungssoziologie (Aspects of Development Sociology), Köln-Opladen 1969.

¹⁵ See J. Tinbergen, Alternatives In Modernization of Developing Countries, Vienna Institute for Development, Publication No. 1, 12. X. 1971.

¹⁶ J. Galtung, A Structural Theory of Imperialism, in: Journal of Peace Research, No. 2, 1971.

¹⁷ See P. Bairoch, Le Tiers Monde dans l'Impasse, Paris 1971.

¹⁸ See R. Bonnain-Moerdijk, La Colonisation, Force Externe, in: Revue Tiers Monde, p. 409 (V. XIII, No. 50, Avril-Juin 1972).

¹⁹ See S. Amin, Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa, in: Journal of Peace Research, p. 105, (No. 2, 1972).

²⁰ For more details on this question, see M. Mushkat, The Small States and Research Into Aspects of War and Peace, in: IPRA Studies in Peace Research, p. 230, (Vol. 1, Van Gorcum, Assen, 1970).