

“De-Linking” and Domestic Reaction*

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There is a strong view in certain Left circles, especially in certain European Left circles, that any de-linking from global capitalism conduces to a promotion of domestic reaction. Of course, even in Europe this is not necessarily the dominant view on the Left; for instance, the Communists and other segments of the Greek Left, which favour Greece’s quitting the Eurozone instead of accepting the “austerity” measures imposed by the so-called “troika” of creditors, do not obviously take this postulated connection, between de-linking from a supra-national institution of capital and domestic reaction, seriously; but it is a significant view. And in several Left and progressive liberal circles in third world countries like ours, especially those circles which are intellectually influenced by these segments of the European Left, such a view prevails: it argues that even though globalization is damaging for the living conditions of the working people in countries like ours, it has to be fought in ways other than by de-linking from it, since such de-linking can only promote the domestic reactionary forces.

What these other ways are is never made clear, and the question of their efficacy in defending the interests of the people is never discussed; nonetheless, this view, that de-linking from globalization, through inter alia the imposition of controls on cross-border flows of capital and goods, conduces to the promotion of domestic reactionary forces, commands considerable influence. In fact, at the Kochi festival some years ago, Slavoj Zizek the renowned Slovenian Marxist philosopher had argued that any such de-linking from globalization, by promoting “nationalism” and a retreat into itself within the third world country attempting it, goes against an internationalist, or at the very least a cosmopolitan, outlook, which is essential for keeping the domestic reactionary forces at bay.

I do not wish to go into a discussion of the possible alternatives to de-linking; since the opponents of de-linking do not themselves spell out such alternatives, let alone argue explicitly in favour of them, we need not enter that territory. Besides, it stands to reason that since there are no international peasant movements, and no really effective international workers’ movements either, for resisting the effects of globalization, i.e. since the nation remains the primary arena of class resistance against the effects of globalization, if such resistance succeeds in coming to power, it has no alternative but to de-link from globalization. What I wish to do however is not to repeat these obvious points, but rather to draw attention to an apparent “paradox” that bears on this entire question. And that consists in the fact that it is not de-linking from globalization but globalization itself that conduces to a strengthening of reactionary forces in countries like ours, that it is not “nationalism” directed against globalization, which is an expression of the hegemony of international finance capital, that promotes reaction by being “inward-looking”, but rather international finance capital itself that promotes reaction as a means of retaining its hegemony.

There is in fact a disturbing parallel here between the World Bank’s critique of the import-substitution strategy of the dirigiste period, which led to the development of significant self-reliance in technology and the capacity to produce goods, as being “inward-looking”, and hence wrong, and the argument of these segments of the Left that de-linking from globalization, being “inward-looking”, is wrong because it conduces to domestic reaction. To say this is not to malign these Left segments, but merely to underscore two points: first, “inward-looking” and “outward-looking” are not class terms; using them without taking into account the class context therefore can camouflage crucial aspects of social reality. And second, to the extent that these terms are used despite awareness of the social reality, since “outward-looking” necessarily means forging strong links with a world dominated by

imperialism, those segments of the Left that frown upon an “inward-looking” trajectory are underestimating the deleterious effects of imperialist domination.

They do so for two possible reasons: either because they do not recognize at all the presence of imperialism as a phenomenon (though they may recognize “the empire” as an empirical entity, or recognize and condemn individual “imperialist adventures” such as in Iraq where the advanced countries had an eye on the oil resources), or because, basing themselves on Marx’s writings on India in the early 1850s, they see a “positive side” to the third world’s exposure to major capitalist powers. While this “positive side” might have been pertinent historically, it has no relevance once the people of the third world have risen in anti-imperialist revolts to enforce decolonization. (In fact to claim a “positive side” to imperialism after decolonization has occurred, is tantamount to denying a progressive historical role to decolonization itself).

Once we accept the abiding nature of imperialism and see the current globalization as an expression of imperialism, though of course in a changed context, de-linking from globalization in a world where resistance and struggles are nationally organized becomes a necessary item on the agenda. And it also constitutes the means for overcoming rather than paving the way for domestic reaction.

This is obvious in our own context. The anti-colonial struggle in India had activated the people, and brought them together around an agenda that included inter alia one person-one vote, certain fundamental rights for every “citizen”, equality before law irrespective of caste, religion and gender, and separation of religion from the State, all of which represented a sharp break from the social inequality practiced for millennia. Many of these are under threat today, in danger of being undermined de facto by the communal forces that occupy the leading positions in the State, with the help of the corporate-financial oligarchy that is aligned to international finance capital. These communal forces, it is worth remembering, were completely aloof from the anti-colonial struggle, not a single one of their icons and leaders having ever been involved in it (and Savarkar who had been involved earlier, dissociated himself from it after tendering an “apology” to the colonial rulers).

Put differently, “modernity” in the sense of overcoming the legacy of millennia of institutionalized inequality and realizing the notion of a fraternity of equal “citizens”, though in itself representing no more than the ideal that the bourgeois order projects, can be achieved neither through a linkage with imperialism, nor under the aegis of the domestic bourgeoisie that forges such a link with imperialism, and with its chief agency in the era of globalization, i.e. international finance capital. The progress towards “modernity” itself is a task that devolves upon the Left in societies like ours; and for this it has to struggle against the hegemony of international finance capital, and hence for de-linking from an order dominated by it.

“Finance capital”, Lenin had emphasized, always wants “domination”. For this it must divide the people, promote communalism, undermine the political activation of the people, and subvert all tendencies towards the realization of a “fraternity of equal citizens” which is the avowed ideal of democracy. The struggle against finance capital is necessarily inclusive, while the hegemony of finance capital is necessarily accompanied by the imposition of divisiveness, by a sniffing out of the fault-lines of the pre-existing society and exacerbating those fault-lines.

But then, it may be asked, how do we explain the plethora of fundamentalist and reactionary movements that we find all over the third world these days, which stand in such sharp contrast to the humanism apparently professed and preached by the advanced countries (whom we designate as imperialist powers) that the latter appear as oases of “modernity” and tolerance within an ocean of bigotry and intolerance? Underlying this phenomenon however is a fact of outstanding importance, namely the systematic

destruction by the imperialist powers themselves of the progressive upsurge that the anti-colonial struggle in the third world had represented, of the “modernity” that the anti-colonial struggle had stood for.

All the major theatres of Islamic fundamentalism today are places which were once in the forefront of progressive struggles in the third world, and every one of such struggles was destroyed by imperialism. Mosadegh’s secular democratic regime supported by the Tudeh Party in Iran was overthrown, with the help of Ayatollah Kashani, because it dared to nationalize oil. Saddam Husain’s Baath Party was helped by imperialism to overthrow the progressive regime of General Kassem in Iraq, which had been supported by the Communists; and later Saddam Husain’s own regime which at least professed secularism was overthrown, again by imperialism, which deliberately promoted the Shia-Sunni divide to bolster its position. President Soekarno’s regime in Indonesia, which had the support of the Communists, was overthrown by imperialism in a bloody military coup by Suharto, which was followed by a pogrom that left half a million Communists dead; and today fundamentalism is making its presence felt in Indonesia. Sudan, another place where fundamentalist forces are rearing their head, had the largest Communist Party in Africa, but an imperialist-backed coup by Nimieri seized power and the Communist leader, Comrade Mahjoub, was executed. And of course in Afghanistan, it was the imperialism-promoted jihad against the Communist regime supported by the Soviet Union that spawned the Taliban and the Al quaeda.

In short, imperialism which appears as the benign defender of “human values” against the fundamentalist bigots everywhere, is itself the progenitor of the bigots; it systematically destroyed all progressive, secular nationalist regimes in the third world, while directly promoting, or leaving the stage empty for, the fundamentalist bigots.

This is not to say that the secular nationalist regimes of the third world did not have their own failings, weaknesses and contradictions. We know in India the compromise with landlordism that the post-independence government entered into which sapped the viability of the dirigiste economic regime; similar stories can be repeated from other contexts. But the basic point is this: it was never left to the third world countries to work out their own class contradictions and class antagonisms. Imperialism, inevitably, entered everywhere; it intervened everywhere, and the result of its intervention was a strengthening everywhere of the forces of reaction. Hence to see reaction as the product of an “inward-looking” strategy, and an overcoming of reaction as being facilitated by being linked to imperialism, is to miss a crucial point about the contemporary reality.

** This article was originally published in the People’s Democracy, August 30, 2015 edition.*