

WHAT WILL AN INTEGRATED SOCIALIST WORLD LOOK LIKE?  
Brief comments on Warren Wagar's article: "Toward a Praxis  
of a World Integration"

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World integration under a single state is foreseen by world-system theorists as the only means to save the world from destruction and chaos. The exhaustion of capitalism will lead, in their view, to the substitution of the current system of competing sovereign states by a democratic, liberal and socialist commonwealth. In his article Warren Wagar discusses who will lead this transition, and indirectly suggests that a world system party similar to that of his novel *A Short History of the Future* (1992) may be the most feasible way to guarantee the socialist character of the new world state.

In *A Short History of the Future* the party was

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initiated in an American university, in other words it originated in the academic realm, suggesting that world-system thinkers could contribute in the building of the world party. He defends the universality of the values of the "Left Enlightenment" and considers that "whenever local cultures diverge from its values...we must assert, and persuade others to assert, the priority of democratic socialism" (Wagar, 1995:5).

The object of politics, unlike that of the academy, is a very practical one: to take state power, or, at least, to accumulate enough power to modify the established order in the desired direction. This goal can be reached by violent means, using economic power, manipulation and corruption, or via a democratic route. Wagar proposes to follow the democratic way. The construction of a world party that ensures the triumph of democracy, freedom and socialism requires joining forces and mobilizing people's will around a new project for society. If the party's program genuinely reflects the peoples' interests, needs and concerns, the party will have adherents and supporters.

I can imagine Marx and his colleagues, little more than one hundred years back, infused by the same concern, motivated by the same ideals and the same resistance to accept that we live in the best of possible worlds. But, unlike our modern academics, Marx was free of the

disenchantment of the last one hundred years: the unlimited ability of capitalism to adapt and reproduce itself, the increasing dismantling of the welfare state, the growing gap between poor and rich countries and, over all, the failure of the socialist experiment in Eastern Europe. In Marx's time, it was still possible to believe that the logic of society's evolution would naturally lead to a socialist

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world. I do not know what Marx would think if he could see the real course of his political project, but I understand that the world needs a new project of society, a political project that gives direction to the actions of the majority, who are overwhelmed by abuses and the concentration of economic and political power.

In this sense, the concern that has motivated the world-system group to transcend the narrow limits of the academy and to start thinking in political terms seems very positive. The formation of a world party, however, looks at first sight premature, perhaps as premature as in its time was the Socialist International. And it is not the discrepant interests of the new social movements or cultural differences that in my opinion make this project appear unrealistic. After all, the capitalist ideology has proved to have an extraordinary capacity to penetrate the most divergent cultures and to unify the most disparate interests. Even if it could be argued that capitalism permeated all cultures by using force and military power, the socialist states also had this resource and still declined.

The problem is the lack of a feasible alternative model of society, one that is able to solve the fundamental contradictions that led to the failure of socialism in Eastern Europe and to the drawing back of the welfare state in Europe, Canada and the U.S.

In my view, the success of capitalism is, above all, a product of its capacity to organize the world's economy. Braudel distinguishes between capitalism and market economy; even more, he considers capitalism as the antithesis of the market economy because it works against market's laws through its monopoly of economic and its control over

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political power (cf. Arrighi 1994:10). From world-system theory we have also learned that capitalism emerges precisely from the marriage of capital and the state (Braudel 1982; Wallerstein 1991; Arrighi 1994). The states that currently rule over the vast majority of the world are

therefore capitalist states. In other words, it does not matter how democratic they can be or how egalitarian some of them can look; as soon as these concessions to society put at risk the utility margin of the "lords of money," they will turn over "their states" to correct those deviations. That is what neoliberal states have been doing during the last two decades.

For these reasons, it is not possible to shift the world from capitalism to socialism only by political means, i.e., by taking state power. Chase-Dunn (1989) envisions the emergence of the world state (or the world federation) before the arrival of socialism. In other words a socialist world party will have to take over a capitalist state. It is necessary to solve first, theoretically at least, the problem of how the world economy could function without capitalist accumulation. Otherwise, the socialist world party will be working in the best of cases to balance the demands of capitalists, which is not at all bad, but it will never be able to eliminate their power, nor even to control it. This is the lesson that we learned from the socialist governments of Spain and France.

What kind of institutions can substitute for the capitalist financial and productive systems? The East European socialist countries substituted bureaucrats for capitalists but they were not able to invent an efficient alternative to organize economic life. The socialist experiment has yet to be seriously and coldly studied and

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analyzed. World-system theorists prefer to discard these experiences by suppressing the term socialist and by considering them capitalist. The problem was, in Wagar's view, Stalin's proclamation of "socialism in one country." I think it was more complex than that. The expansion of socialism in Eastern Europe and Asia was large enough to have allowed the emergence of an independent world system. The reasons why this did not occur have yet to be explained. But even if these states continue to be linked to the capitalist world economy, internally they eliminated the "capitalist top layer" of their societies, to use Braudel's expression (1982), and created a highly inefficient production system (Kornai 1986). Maybe some new relations of production emerged in these countries but these were drowned by bureaucracy or by the world-reigning capitalism.

Another problem is the agent of transformation. As Wagar says, citing Wallerstein, "the building of an egalitarian democratic world order demands a 'social praxis socially arrived at'" (Wagar, 1995:11). Marx thought that the working class was to be the transforming agent. Maybe he was wrong; maybe the rebellion of a single class is not enough. Perhaps the kind of crisis that Wagar describes in his novel is indeed necessary. But under current conditions it is hard to imagine a group of academics leading the

process. Even if they were able to recruit enough adherents worldwide to infiltrate the centers of power, as Wagar seems to suggest, this will not change the logic of capitalist accumulation.

In my view, the main strength of the academy in the first world is its legitimacy. It provides in my opinion the best platform to construct the kind of "overarching consciousness of the need to confront the capitalist world-system"

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whose lack, Wagar says, affects today's global political culture. This is what Marx did one hundred years ago. His ideas were present in most of the anti-systemic social movements of the century. Today we need a new theory, not only a theory that explains how capitalism works, as world-system theory does, but one that based on the knowledge accumulated during a century of studies and economic and political experiments is able to imagine an alternative form of organizing the world economy.

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