

DYNAMICS OF GLOBAL CRISIS
Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein
Macmillan, 1982 hbk £12.50 pbk £6.00
ISBN 0 333 34077 9

CRISIS: IN THE THIRD WORLD
Andre Gunder Frank
Heinemann, 1981 pbk £5.50
ISBN 0 435 84363 X

THE THIRD WORLD IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT
Ankie M.M. Hoogvelt
Macmillan, 1982 pbk £5.50
ISBN 0 333 27682 5

Much of the discussion on the British Left of the current economic crisis and of the alternative economic strategy suffers from an incorrigible insularity. The preoccupation with immediate and local problems that this reflects is far more defensible than the perverse neglect of the larger historical and political issues with which it is typically associated. For without some understanding of the historical processes that have brought about the present crisis and of the political forces that will provide a way out of it, it is unlikely that the present conjuncture can be either fully apprehended, or fully surmounted.

This insularity is in a way endemic, the expression of an embattled empiricism and of a well-tested 'economism' constantly striving for limited, short-term and piecemeal economic gains that are such a striking feature of labour politics in Britain. As one moves farther left across the political spectrum, this insularity is often overlaid with a thick coating of dogmatism, by the propensity to argue from set positions and with set pieces, whatever their proclaimed source of authority or inspiration. The resulting, somewhat unusual and certainly

uneasy, union of empiricism and dogmatism is possibly a manifestation of the long, traditional isolation of 'English' Marxism from the mainstream of the labour movement in Britain, which in turn can be seen to be one of the ideological legacies — racism being another — of the country's imperial past.

Against this backdrop, a work like *Dynamics of Global Crisis* that addresses itself to the origins and prospects of the present crisis by viewing it in an historical and global perspective is indeed welcome. The four contributors to this symposium are all on the left, and 'committed to the historical objectives of world socialism: democracy and equality'. They approach the task in hand, not only with an impressive array of qualifications, but determined to distance themselves from various 'orthodoxies'. 'There is no question in any of our minds that there is a 'crisis' in Marxism as an explanatory model, as well as a crisis in socialism as a world-historical movement.

Of the four authors Samir Amin alone still sports a 'Marxist-Leninist' label. This is not to allege that the other three are social-democrats (a strategy that they explicitly reject) or 'Eurocommunists'. Indeed, one of the chief difficulties of their

problematic is that it is incapable of generating a practical political strategy; the view taken by them is *so* long that it virtually borders on the meta-historical. At any rate, no short or medium term political conclusions can be inferred from their analyses. This suggests that there may be something wrong not just with their answers but also with some of the questions that they pose. But the very effort of the rethinking that is required is surely worthwhile; and with the daring of their undertaking and the breadth of their vision, as well as by the 'friendliness' of their debate, they set a good example for others on the Left to follow.

The common ground shared by all four of the *Dynamics* quartet is their belief in a 'social whole that may be called a capitalist world-economy', and three of them — Amin, Frank and Wallerstein — have done pioneering work on the formation of this world-system, which amounts in important respects to a revision or rejection of the 'classical' theory of imperialism as formulated by Lenin. Both Frank and Wallerstein profess to having had no particular use for the concept of imperialism; for Arrighi, it provided a useful map of the world in the first half of the 20th century, but not any longer; Amin alone

has still some use for it, and he has tried to cast his world-system analysis in an imperialist mould (but with mixed results).

The four are further agreed that, throughout its history, the world-system has met with 'increasing opposition to its continuance', but that despite the 'unprecedented political strength' of the world's 'anti-systemic' forces, 'both the praxis and the theory of the world socialist movement are in trouble'. Given this global standpoint, 'the crisis' is seen by them as being 'worldwide and integral', embracing within its fold the socialist and the 'peripheral' Third World, as well as the 'core' capitalist countries. They differ, however, over the question of long term patterns of capitalist development, over 'the balance sheet of the anti-systemic forces' and over the prospects for the future. These differences, in turn, cause them to entertain differing views on the current economic crisis, that is, the world economic stagnation that began in the late 1960s and bids fair to last well into the 1980s.

For Wallerstein, who bats first, this immediate, lesser crisis is but a moment in the bigger, 'systemic crisis', 'the crisis of the demise of the capitalist world-economy', 'a crisis of transition . . . to a socialist world order'; but lest we should be carried away

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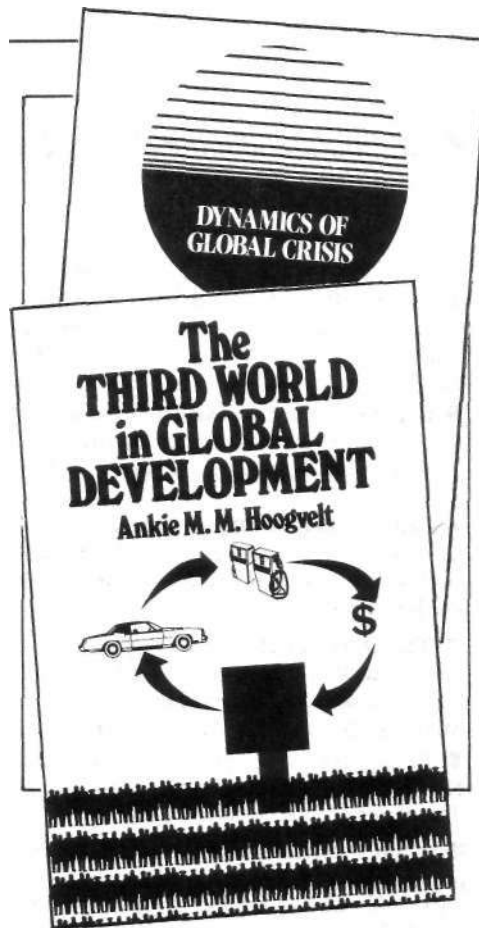
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by premature jubilation, or an illusion of imminent triumph, he informs us that 'the crisis will no doubt continue through the twenty-first century. Frank, by comparison, appears to give the system an even longer life expectancy. For him the crisis is not at all of the system as such, but is little more than a periodical crisis of capitalist accumulation. The 'world economic crisis' is seen by him as 'developing out of the imbalances in changing productive capacities, supply and demand, and international trade flows in the world economic systems as a whole', which he fully expects 'will result in the regeneration of the capitalist system and its renewed expansion' — a crisis, in short, not of decay and decline but of renewal and growth; and he cannot yet foresee the demise of world capitalism. This is indeed a far cry from the view of imperialism as moribund capitalism. It is not being mean to Frank and Wallerstein to say that, if they are right, capitalism has nothing to fear but fear itself!

In contrast, both Arrighi and Amin have a much more modest and down-to-earth view of the crisis, perhaps because they are more alert to political trends than the other two. For Arrighi, the crisis specifically describes a (recurrent) period of 'discontinuous change' which the world economy entered in 1968 that is in effect 'the crisis of the world political-economic order established after World War II under US hegemony'. While giving a similar definition of the crisis, Amin shifts the emphasis from developments in the 'core' countries to certain political sea-changes in the Third World (notably the oil crisis of 1973 and the US defeat in Vietnam in 1975). Whereas for Arrighi there is a 'crisis of hegemony', for Amin it becomes a 'crisis in the North-South relationship', that is, 'a crisis in imperialism'. But they both concur with the other two that the world-system is not about to collapse, thereby avoiding further unemployment!

In fairness to Frank, it should be said that he does not allow his confidence in — or 'realism' about — the long term prospects of the capitalist world-system to blind him to the havoc that the present crisis is wreaking on the Third World. In his *Crisis: In The Third World* (together with its companion volume on crisis in the world economy) his views on the subject are set out at great length, and the treatment is characteristically thorough and trenchant in tone. The singularly grim picture that he paints of what the world crisis is doing to the peoples of the Third World, not just economically but also socially and politically, is in sharp contrast to the brave new



world of capitalist industrialisation, progress and democracy promised the Third World by some other 'Marxist' writers. This only shows that Frank's heart is in the right place, even though his head might be up in the clouds.

Many of these themes again crop up in Ankie Hoogvelt's *The Third World in Global Development*. She is herself a staunch partisan of the world-system theory, and her book is valuable, not least, for providing a clear and level-headed summary of the latest ideas of three of the four contributors to *Dynamics of Global Crisis*. Though written primarily for a university student audience, her books should be found useful by many a general reader. In addition, he gives a resume of the main features of the Third World's on-going integration into the world economy throughout the 1970s. But because her reading of 'facts' is uncritically from a world-system, and 'economistic' standpoint, the tone of her conclusions so far as the Third World is concerned is even more stark and pessimistic than that of Frank. Largely because she confuses some transient features of 'global development' in the 1970s (which are, in any event, interpreted without the kind of political 'sixth sense' shown by Arrighi and Amin) with stable, long term trends of development, she inevitably veers towards a picture of the world economy that is increasingly less hierarchical, more plural-

istic and essentially unfocused; and from the resulting composition, both the economic theory of imperialism and the political reality of the Third World are virtually banished.

This, in fact, takes us to the heart of the weakness of the world-system theory, for in completely parting company with the theory of imperialism it goes to the other extreme. It may be argued with some justice that the world-system analysis, when it first appeared, in important respects supplemented and enriched the classical theory of imperialism, insofar as the latter was essentially an account of the monopoly stage of capitalism. But it did so at the expense of sacrificing the other aspect of imperialism as the theory of international political and economic relations in the period of monopoly capitalism. During this period colonial societies were implanted and 'transformed' in a particular fashion in order to secure the ends of trans-national, trans-continental and trans-cultural exploitation. In particular, the world-system theory has paid insufficient attention, not only to contradictions within the world-economy, but also — more important — to the social and political 'arrangements' of oppression found within the various societies taken separately that determine the interlocking of national and class struggles, particularly in the Third World. World-system theory allows for no serious analysis of class contradictions within particular national societies; in its place the nebulous concept of 'anti-systemic forces' is a poor bargain. World-system theory, rather like its right wing cousin, 'one-world' theory, ends up seriously overemphasising the strengths of 'the system'. False optimism may be a delusion — but surely false pessimism is a snare?

Jitendra Mohan

BOOK NOTES

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