

# Theory and Practice of Marxism in International Relations

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## Abstract

*This article is devoted to the study of Marxist theory in International Relations. Marxist theory presents itself as both an analytical framework and a praxis. This is why it has been the subject of so much theoretical controversy and political struggle. However, this paper does not exhumate this debate. It aims rather to show how the founding fathers (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels) and the thinkers of the Second International laid down, on the one hand, the theoretical foundations of Marxism, on the other hand the approaches they elaborated on key issues such as class struggle, imperialism, and capitalism. While some internationalists have predicted its death, others still speak of the "Marxist crisis", it is clear that after the end of the Cold War marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist regimes on the world stage "the phoenix always rises from its own ashes". This revival of Marxism is due to neo-Marxist theories whose approaches are found at the heart of the questions of our study.*

*Key words Marxism, Marxism-Leninism, Neo-Marxism, Class struggle, Communism, Capitalism, and Imperialism.*

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## Résumé

*Cet article est consacré à l'étude de la théorie marxiste en Relations internationales. La théorie marxiste se présente tout à la fois comme un cadre d'analyse, mais aussi une praxis. C'est pourquoi il a fait l'objet de tant de controverses théoriques et de luttes politiques. Cependant, il ne s'agit pas d'exhumer ce débat. Cette étude s'attache plutôt à montrer, comment les pères fondateurs (Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels) et les penseurs de la Seconde Internationale ont posé d'une part, les fondements théoriques du marxisme et d'autre part, quelles approches ont-ils élaborées sur les questions clés comme la lutte des classes, l'impérialisme et le capitalisme. Pendant que certains internationalistes ont prédit sa mort et d'autre encore ont parlé de la « crise marxiste », force est de constater qu'après la fin de la guerre froide marqué par l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique et les régimes communistes sur la scène mondiale « le phénix renaît toujours de ses propres cendres ». Cette renaissance du*

*marxisme on la doit aux théories néo-marxistes dont les approches se retrouvent, au cœur des questionnements de notre étude.*

*Mots-clés Marxisme, Marxisme-léninisme, Néo-marxisme, Lutte des classes, Communisme, Capitalisme, Impérialisme.*

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## **Introduction**

Marxism is a theory based on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. On the international scene, it is manifested in the opposition between communism and imperialism. The notion of communism is based on the participation in the class struggle to achieve a classless world society, putting an end to the state and based on the collective and democratic ownership of the means of production as an alternative to capitalism. The notion of imperialism was developed by the economist John Atkinson Hobson who criticized the British version of imperialism (Atkinson Hobson, 1902). Imperialism refers to a process of control or domination by one entity over other populations or territories. It is linked to the notion of empire, a form of political organization that originated from antiquity. Historically, imperialism refers to the policy of military expansion of European states through colonial conquest.

Appearing after the death of Vladimir Ilitch Ulyanov (1870-1924), known as Lenin, "Marxism-Leninism" was during the Cold War the official ideology of the communist movement, parties and states aligned with the USSR or the People's Republic of China. But when the systematic confrontation of antagonistic blocs in the East and West came to an end, "Marxism-Leninism" was declared a failure and lost all legitimacy in the eyes of those who had to comply with its rules until now. Indeed, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1980 and in front of the popular pressure, the one-party communist political systems fell in front of the triumph of the multi-party capitalist political systems.

If Marxism has lost battles to realism and liberalism, however, there are historical episodes that have shown that the class struggle is far from having disappeared in the international scene. Beyond the resistance of Marxism led, on one hand, by the classical theories of international emancipation and capitalist imperialism supported by the theses of the founding fathers of Marxism (Karl Marx and Engels) and,

on the other hand by the thinkers of the Second International (Lenin-Luxembourg, Hilferding, Bukharin and Kautsky) who laid the foundations of a Marxist reading of International Relations, we observed the emergence of a new branch claiming to be neo-Marxism. Henceforth, the struggle that was taking place between the three main theories of International Relations has moved to the field of the confrontation between neo-neo approaches. Thus, in this opposition, neo-Marxism relies mainly on three theoretical approaches, namely: the theory of dependence, the neo-Gramscian theory and the theory of the world-system. Therefore, what were the contributions of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and the thinkers of the Second International in the construction of the Marxist theory of International Relations? How did Marxism adapt itself after the end of the Cold War?

In contrast to realist and liberal theories, our study of Marxist theory of international relations focuses on the concept of "social classes," not on the notion of the state. For Marx and Engels, International Relations are not defined as relations between states, but between "social classes". In this statocentric approach, the State is not the international leviathan (Hobbesian realist theory). The State is not there to regulate the laws of competition (liberal theory). The State is there to guarantee the power of the bourgeois over the proletarians. In this logic, on the level of internal politics, the State contributes to the enslavement of the proletarians and represents the national interests defined in political and economic terms of the bourgeois class. On the level of foreign policy, the "bourgeois state" leads a struggle against the bourgeoisie of other states. In this sense, the foreign policy of a state is not meant to represent a general interest but only the interests of the dominant national bourgeois class.

This article is organized around three main points. First, a special interest is given to the study of the Marxist theory of International Relations. The second point focuses on the examination of neo-Marxist theories of International Relations. The third and last point examines the practice of Marxism after Lenin.

## 1. The Marxist Theory of International Relations

### 1.1. *The theory of the "class struggle"*

Marxism has its roots in two thinkers, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) (Molnar, 1975). Karl Marx did not place his work under the umbrella of international relations, but he did lay the foundation for a study of the process of exploitation on a global scale. Karl Marx's work directly inspired political leaders such as Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, known as Lenin, and the Soviet system. In the field of International Relations, Marxism has its origins in the critique of realism and especially liberalism. Like realism and liberalism, the theory of Marxist inspiration has the ambition of a global analysis, and tries to determine the general explanatory variable of International Relations beyond the particular cases. But contrary to the first two theories, which place the political factors in the center of their analysis (search of the power for realism, nature of the relations State-society for liberalism), the Marxist, supports a *contrario* that it is the transformations of the material economic conditions of existence which determine the evolution of the political relations, the ideas and the conscience, this evolution generating in its turn new metamorphoses of the concrete conditions of existence... until the advent of an egalitarian and just society: Communism (Ethier, 2018).

According to Marx, the evolution of human societies has always been marked by an opposition between oppressors and oppressed. For Marx and Engels, since the appearance of private property and the state, all slave, feudal and capitalist societies have been divided into classes: the ruling class, which owns the means of production of economic wealth and controls the state; the oppressed class, which produces wealth through its own labor without exercising control over the means of production and political power; and intermediate classes (artisans, merchants, intellectuals, professionals, etc. ) who have limited access to the ownership of the means of production and who exercise limited influence on political power (Marx, 1867; Engels, 1884). It is within this framework that Marx asserted in a now famous quote that: "*L'histoire de toutesociétéjusqu'ànosjoursestl'histoire de lutte des classes*" (Marx and Engels, 1848, p.6). He thus considers that this division of society into classes is the result of an unequal

distribution of the means of production in which the class struggle is the fundamental motor of history. The class struggle, according to Marx and Engels, is however neither a fatality, nor a characteristic of human nature: it did not exist before the birth of private property, at the time of primitive communism, and it will disappear with the replacement of capitalism by communism.

In capitalist society, which is the last to have emerged, it is the proletariat with only its labor power that constitutes the class of the oppressed, while the class of the oppressors is composed of a minority known as the "bourgeois" who own the capital. In International Relations, this dualization of society is characterized by an approach of a world divided between a "center" (the dominant, essentially the large industrialized countries) and a "periphery" (the dominated, essentially the states resulting from decolonization). For Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists, international politics can only be understood as an effect of the dominant economic "structure": the world capitalist system. To this end, the relevant units of analysis are no longer nation-states or society or the individual, but "social classes", with their position within a schema where "centers" dominate "peripheries".

This approach, established by Marxist theorists, extends the class struggle to a global scale. According to Karl Marx, there is an antagonism inherent in the very structure of the capitalist regime: the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Its origin lies in a mode of production based on private property and on wage labor. The latter, because it functions according to the principle of "surplus value" (the difference between the value created by the worker and the value that his work costs the capitalist) is at the very foundation of the exploitation relation. This analysis will again be extended to the international level: exploitation through trade because of the inequality of the terms of trade, exploitation of the workers of the South by the multinational firms (MNFs) which have their headquarters in the North (possibly relayed by a peripheral bourgeoisie, i.e. a Westernized bourgeoisie, socially dominant in the countries of the South).

### *1.2. The theory of the capitalist mode of production*

Marx's quest was to arrive at a "scientific" understanding of how capitalism works in order to provide the working class with the tools to overthrow it. His most important work was the unfinished three-volume *Capital*, which set out his theory of the capitalist mode of production. As the subtitle of the work indicates, Marx conceived his work *Capital* as a "critique of political economy," that is, a critique of the classical liberal economic theory developed by Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823), who argued that, in capitalism, it is the value produced by labor that is the source of wealth. Unlike Ricardo, who saw capitalism as an implacable logic of market "laws" that humans could not control, Marx presents capitalism as a social mode of production and reproduction. In reality, in his critiques of wage labor, capital and political economy, Marx distances himself from Adam Smith and David Ricardo by asserting that only the labor time of the producer, the worker or proletarian, is a source of value. The capitalist's profit comes from the surplus-value or labor time of the worker that is not paid to him in wages. While for Smith and Ricardo, competition within the capitalist market favors free access to private property for all and the general enrichment of society, for Marx and Engels this competition forces firms to constantly increase their rate of surplus-value through strategies that provoke crises of overproduction and the impoverishment of the working and middle classes (Marx, 1867).

Moreover, for Marx, politics is subordinated to economics because it is the regime of production (the "infrastructure") that determines the mechanisms of political domination (the "superstructure"): the political institutions (the State) but also the legal and intellectual institutions (ideologies, philosophies...) are the instruments by which the dominant classes (bourgeoisie, large landowners) ensure and perpetuate their domination over the working class. The state is, according to Marx, "a machine of repression". Only a "proletarian revolution" that would change the relations of production can put an end to it. Marx supports a world revolution capable of transcending the "bourgeois" borders, as indicated by his famous "Prolétaires de tous les pays, unissez-vous!" (Marx, 1848, p.3).

## 2. Thinkers of the Second International

### *2.1. Lenin and the theory of imperialism*

It is the thinkers of the Second International (Lenin, Luxemburg, Hilferding, Bukharin and Kautsky) who laid the foundations of a Marxist reading of International Relations. According to them, the concept of imperialism makes it possible to grasp the internationalization of capital in a context of conflicting inter-state relations. For these theorists, imperialism marks a stage of development of capitalism characterized by the fusion of productive and banking capital. It is the result of an effort to consolidate national capital in order to face increased competition. It takes the form of cartels and monopolies. This fusion lays the foundations for a convergence between capitalists, unified on a national basis, and the state. The state, during the classical period of capitalism (19th century), was the guarantor of capitalist reproduction in general and thus transcended the interests of individual capitalists. But in the stage of imperialism, the state becomes a much more active player in the competition between capitalists, since the interests of the new national coalitions have become inseparable from the economic health of their respective countries. According to these theorists, this consolidation is coupled with a process of internationalization of capital. Imperialism, however, does not preside over the homogenization of the world, but takes shape as a process of re-articulation of the division of labor on an international basis. Bukharin, in particular, sees it as a process of specialization that only reinforces national differences within the framework of unequal development (Bukharin, 1967). The internationalization of capital thus goes hand in hand with increasing economic differentiation between nation-states.

At the outbreak of the First World War, all European socialist parties voted in their respective national parliaments in favor of the "bourgeois" war, betraying their vows of proletarian solidarity. The Second Socialist International was mortally wounded. It was in this context that Lenin, founder of the Bolshevik Party, leader of the Russian revolution of 1917 and first head of state of the USSR, systematized and adapted the Marxist theory of International Relations to the conditions of the 20th century (Lenin, 1979). Indeed, Lenin

revisited three aspects of Marxism of Marx and Engels. First, his notion of the "uneven and combined development" of capitalism breaks with Marx's argument that capitalism would create the same class relations and productive forces throughout the world that it had shaped in nineteenth-century Britain. From his statement of uneven and combined development springs the idea that socialist revolution cannot emerge, as Marx and Engels believed, from the most advanced countries, for it is in its weakest link that the imperialist chain of the global capitalist would break. Marx and Engels defend the idea that capitalism has a universal scope that not only leads to a convergence of different societies as a result of the expansion of the field of capital accumulation, but also universalizes the interests of similar social classes belonging to different countries (Lenin, 1966). Thus the tension between the national political framework and the universalizing scope of capitalism will be at the heart of the evolution of the Marxist treatment of International Relations during the 20th century. It can be interpreted as the result of an ambivalence towards the reality of the nation-state.

Lenin saw revolutionary potential in the entire colonial world. He understood that, although it was at that time the least developed economy in Europe, Russia was likely to be the site of the first proletarian revolution. According to Lenin, only the elimination of imperialism through a world proletarian revolution would restore economic prosperity and peace. To achieve this end, Lenin insisted, secondly, on the creation of an "avant-garde" party of revolutionary cadres whose role would be to transform the "conscience économique" of the proletarians into a "conscience révolutionnaire" (Lenin, 1966). This would fundamentally change the relation between the working class and "its" party on one hand, and the concept of socialist revolution on the other. These two Leninist notions had a great impact on world politics from 1917 to 1989.

*Imperialism, the Supreme Stage of Capitalism* is the third "modification" that Lenin made to Marxism. It is an explicitly polemical and political text; a work of synthesis of knowledge rather than an innovative empirical and theoretical analysis of global capitalism. Lenin's aim was twofold: firstly, to explain the betrayal of proletarian internationalism by the main socialist parties in 1914.

Secondly, to cleanse revolutionary Marxism of the conclusion that the outbreak of war in 1914 demonstrated that the "conscience sociale" of the workers will always be surpassed by chauvinistic nationalisms. Lenin's work unlocked the theoretical straitjacket in which Marx had confined socialists who were not fortunate enough to live in advanced capitalist societies. His theory of imperialism would provide a very clear analytical grid through which Marxists would view international politics and it would open up new avenues of analysis of international politics for Marxist revolutionaries.

### ***2.2. The movement from the French and British schools***

The first current movement, stemming from French structuralism, crystallizes around the work of Poulantzas (1973). He seeks to historicize imperialism in terms of the evolution of the international division of labor. Given the longevity and unsuspected dynamism of capitalism, it had become necessary to enrich the notion of imperialism by conceptualizing it, not simply as a historical stage, but as a process leading to different forms. By tracing the different forms of this international division of labor throughout history, this approach proposed to analyze the evolution of the economic infrastructure. In particular, the emergence of multinational firms is seen as a radical change that challenges the national structure of the economy (Michalet, 1976).

This transnational economic context, no longer symmetrical to the national political framework, allows on the theoretical level to grant more easily an autonomy to the State since its interests no longer correspond directly to those of the multinational firms. Thus, the foreign policy of the state does not simply reflect capitalist interests, but the interests of the social factions that come to dominate it. This opening allows us to historicize imperialism by positing that state interests evolve according to those of the social classes that have invested it.

According to Robert Brenner (1977), approaches that start from the international division of labor on the role of the state, such as those of Bukharin or Poulantzas, necessarily explain international relations based on the functional needs of this division. To escape this problem, the emphasis is placed on the particular imperatives that these social

relations impose on the state in terms of its financing, its legitimacy, etc. Thus, the recognition of the autonomy of the political is not a theoretical premise, as in Poulantzas, but a historical fact specific to capitalism that needs to be explained.

According to Justin Rosenberg, who takes up on this point a thesis by Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995), the apparent autonomy of politics in capitalism requires more direct coercive mechanisms, as during feudalism (Rosenberg, 1994b). The politician then becomes capable of specializing in tasks that are no longer directly related to the economy, and he thus appears as an agent who oversees civil society and acts as the ultimate arbiter. According to Rosenberg, the traits attributed to international relations (i.e. anarchy, the essentially conflictual nature of relations between states, internal state sovereignty, etc.) are not the product of a state of nature, but of the capitalist context that gives rise to a particular security dynamic in the modern era (Rosenberg, 1994b).

### 3. Neo-Marxist Theories of International Relations

#### *3.1. The Leninist-inspired theory of dependence*

The Leninist-inspired theory of dependence, or the "l'école de la dépendence", is of Latin American origin. It is made up of several ideological approaches, the two most important of which are the developmentalist approach, conceptualized mainly by the heterodox liberal economists of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America. This neo-Marxist thinking (which rereads the class struggle in the light of the Latin American context, opposing rural and urban proletariats) has had a considerable impact in this part of the world. It has influenced, for example, the nationalization policy in Mexico, the foreign policy of Salvador Allende in Chile or that of Fidel Castro in Cuba. Its central hypothesis aims to explain underdevelopment by the fact that "la périphérie se trouve dans une situation de dépendence structurelle vis-à-vis du centre". It is understood here that what is called the "périphérie" has no precise geographical limit: it is defined by its situation of being dominated. The international division of labor creates an unbalanced development with a gap between the

Westernized elites who benefit from this situation of dependence and a mass of workers who become impoverished (Amin, 1986).

Indeed, for the most critical or radical neo-Marxist authors, the globalization of imperialist capitalism reinforces the dependence of the Developing Countries (DCs) on the developed countries, while accentuating their impoverishment or underdevelopment. The main cause of this dynamic is the inequality of exchanges between the North and the South. This is mainly due to the fact that the countries of the South obtain a lower price for the raw materials that they export to the countries of the North than they pay for the manufactured products that they import. According to these authors, the inequality of North-South trade has only worsened over centuries, so that the relative poverty of Third World countries is more considerable today than it was in colonial times. The only way out of this dynamic of exploitation is to break with the capitalist-imperialist order through socialist revolution (Jalée, 1976).

Immanuel Wallerstein and several authors, including Charles-Albert Michalet, Peter Evans, Pierre Salama, and Patrick Tissier, have challenged the theory of unequal exchange by demonstrating that massive transfers of capital and technology linked to the relocation of banks and multinational firms to the periphery led to the industrialization of several Third World countries and the emergence of a new international division of labor (NIDL) in the post-1960 period. The NIDL is characterized by three poles: the developed countries (DCs) in the center, whose economies are now specialized in services and high-tech industries; the newly industrialized countries (NICs) in the South, where manufacturing production is increasingly concentrated; and the developing countries, which remain essentially exporters of raw materials. The NIDL has profoundly modified the relationships of economic and political domination/dependence within the international system. It has weakened the dependence of the NICs on the DCs, while strengthening their domination over the DCs. It has weakened the relative power of the North vis-à-vis the South, while introducing new inequalities between the countries of the South. The authors of this school do not believe, however, that the NIDL will enable the NICs to free themselves completely from their dependence on the DCs. Although more autonomous economically and

commercially, they will remain subject to the financial, technological and cultural domination of the DCs.

For the less radical neo-Marxists, who associate the globalization of capitalism with a certain redistribution of power, especially economic power, between the periphery and the center, the advent of socialism is not an inevitable outcome. Other alternatives are possible, including nationalism or protectionism, the strengthening of North-South and South-South cooperation and the universalization of the social democratic model (Lipietz, 1985).

### ***3.2. The Neo-Gramscian theory***

This neo-Marxist theory of international relations is based on the work of the Italian neo-Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's main contribution to the neo-Marxist school of thought is his thesis that the power of the ruling class rests not only on coercion, but also on its ability to extend its ideological power through a set of conservative institutions within civil society. The ruling class acquires hegemonic power over civil society when these institutions do only not challenge its power, but also take up its defense, or at least the defense of l' "ordre", in case of popular protest.

According to Gramscians, the realist theory of hegemonic stability cuts the Gramscian concept off from its ontological foundation, because it does not take into account how relations of production are linked to relations of power. The materialist analysis of relations of production is a formal concept applied to regime theory. For Gramsci, power relations based on hegemonic discourse are not only political, they are originally economic and based on the exploitation of workers. This aspect of Gramscian theory is at the heart of the neo-Gramscian analysis of International Relations. The neo-Gramscian approach draws as much on authors of Western Marxism (Gramsci, Thompson, Anderson) as on approaches that are less interested in class analysis (Braudel, Polanyi, Wallerstein). In 1987, Cox situated himself within Marxist debates that opposed theorists who placed more emphasis on the sphere of exchange (Frank, Wallerstein) to those who placed more emphasis on the sphere of production (Anderson, Brenner). He sided with the latter in this debate (Cox, 1987).

As early as 1981, Cox undertook an epistemological, ontological and normative critique of the theory of International Relations. He proposes a line of demarcation between problem-solving theory and Critical Theory. Whereas the former would be content, according to Cox, to isolate and solve a problem in the world as it is offered to the theorist, the latter would take as its object of analysis the conditions of historical appearance of the power relations that generate a given problem within a world order. Critical Theory is necessarily holistic, historical and transformative according to the neogramscians. Ontologically, Cox and Gill reject the idea that the concepts of the study of International Relations can have a transhistorical value. Critical Theory seeks to situate the conditions of their historical emergence and their relations with the configuration of power relations within a given world order. The social world that it seeks to describe and transform is the product of the interaction of social forces; it cannot be explained by means of laws of nature (Murphy and Tooze, 1991).

Neo-Gramscians reject the Cartesian dualism between the knowing subject and its object of study (Cox, 1981; Murphy and Tooze, 1991; Gill, 1993). Inspired by Vico, they refuse to give essential character to concepts having conditions of emergence within a process of objectivation conditioned by power relations within a specific world order (Gill, 1993). Intelligible knowledge of the social world is possible, according to Cox, "que commeunecréation de l'esprithumaine" (Cox, 1976). The social world as an object of knowledge must be understood as the result of social practices whose meaning is shared intersubjectively.<sup>126</sup> Knowledge is always filtered by the knowing subject and its object of knowledge is constantly to be redefined according to the transformations of social practices.

Among the theoretical premises of neogramscians, the main one is "*de considérer les relations de pouvoir au sein des sociétés et de la politique globale sous l'angle des relations de pouvoir reliées à la*

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<sup>126</sup> Gill Stéphane, (dir.), 1993, *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University press, p.27.

production.”<sup>127</sup> Underlying this work as a range of other social relationships and the organization of society as a whole (Cox 1987, ix), Gill points out that : “[...] *pour Gramsci, c’est l’ensemble des relations sociales configuré par les structures sociales (la situation) qui est l’unité d’analyse de base [...] Ainsi, la politique globale forme un tout cohérent dont la dynamique structurante est l’expansion modernisatrice du mode de production capitalistes*” ( Gill, 1993, p.15-24). The study of social forces, production structures, and the political structure of civil societies cannot therefore ignore the social relations that structure the power dynamics within a given world order<sup>128</sup> (Cox, 1976; Cox, 1981).

According to Cox, each world order is characterized by a specific accumulation structure. This corresponds to a certain organization and hierarchy of the modes of social relations of production through which surpluses are transferred from the periphery to the center. For Cox, however, the center-periphery relation corresponds more to an economic than a geographical relation. The accumulation structure of a given world order supports the power position of a historical bloc. A historical bloc is always based on a certain balance between consensus and coercion. In order to maintain its power, the main hegemonic power must ensure its legitimacy among its allies.

On the normative level, the neo-Gramscian approach is characterized by its willingness to articulate forms of resistance within local, national and global civil societies in order to promote an emancipatory transformation of power and production relations

**3.3. The "world-system" theory**

The American sociologist Emmanuel Wallerstein also contributed to the neo-Marxist edifice with his concept of the "world-system". Developed in the 1970s, the "world-system" school adopts a holistic methodology. It conceives the world-system as the only valid unit of comparison in social science. In the *Annales* historian Fernand

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<sup>127</sup>Cox Robert W, 1987, *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, New York, Columbia University press, p.1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 1976, “*On Thinking about the Future of World Order*”, *World Politics*, Vol 28, p.181.

Braudel, this position is reflected in his conception of time and space. For the French historian, the tempo of history has three rhythms. Event-driven history takes as its object the structures of everyday life and corresponds to individual time. Conjunctural history takes as its object the interaction between individuals and economic and political structures. Finally, long-term history takes as its object the geographical, demographic, and cultural transformations that can only be perceived over centuries. Braudel, Wallerstein and Arrighi are suspicious of nation-states as a unit of analysis. Wallerstein, who insists on making a closed social system his main unit of analysis, asserts that there have only been two historical variants: micro-systems and world-systems. Since the former no longer exist, he turns to the modern world-system.

Braudel distinguishes the world economy from world economies. A world economy “ ne met en cause qu’un fragment de l’univers, un morceau de la planète économiquement autonome, capable pour l’essentiel de se suffire à lui-même et auquel ses liaisons et ses échanges intérieurs confèrent une certaine unité organique.” (Braudel, 1979c, p. 14.) This unit coherently organizes a set of economic and political spaces, and three tendency rules summarize its organization. The space it occupies must vary slowly. It must be dominated at the center by a capitalist city (Braudel, 1979c), and its various zones are hierarchically arranged in a spatial configuration that includes developed secondary regions and enormous external margins. The global economy, on the other hand, extends to the wholeworld; it represents “ le marché de tout l’univers,” “le genre humain ou toute une partie du genre humain qui commence ensemble et ne forme plus aujourd’hui en quelque sorte, qu’un seul marché” (Sismondi, dans Braudel, 1979c, p.14).

A world-economy is structured by a division of labor established as a chain of subordinations that determine each other. Unequal exchange, creator of the inequality of the world, and reciprocally, the inequality of the world, obstinate creator of exchange, are old realities (Braudel, 1979c). This international division of labor is organized in the form of the domination of a peripheral zone by a central zone. One of the novelties of the theory of the world-system compared to that of dependence is the concept of semi-periphery, which designates a zone

that is situated in several respects between the other two zones. Wallerstein specifies that: “certaines de ces zones ont été des zones du centre à un moment antérieur d’une économie-monde donnée. D’autres ont été des zones périphériques qui subirent une promotion en raison des changements géopolitiques d’une économie-monde en expansion” (Wallerstein, 1974, p.349-350). Wallerstein also criticizes the Marxist conception of capitalism, which situates the specificity of capitalist social relations in the necessity for the worker to sell his labor power. Braudel, for his part, defines capitalism as “une accumulation de puissance (qui fonde l’échange sur un rapport de force autant et plus que sur la réciprocité)” (Braudel, 1979b, p.8). Wallerstein argues that capitalism “n’implique pas seulement l’appropriation de la plus-value par un propriétaire aux dépens d’un travailleur, mais l’appropriation de surplus de l’ensemble de l’économie-monde par les Etats du centre” (Wallerstein, 1979, p.18-19). He criticizes Marxists trying to understand within a national framework a dynamics that he approaches on a global scale. This is what leads Wallerstein and Braudel to consider certain problems, such as that of the transitional stages of the modes of production, as false problems. A capitalist world-economy necessarily rests, according to them, on the coexistence of modes of production.

Braudel and Wallerstein disagree on the question of the origin of capitalism. According to the latter, the specificity at the origin of the European world-system is the persistent presence of a world-economy that never became an empire and gave rise to an "international" division of labor. The absence of a centralized political authority allowed capitalism to flourish because “le capitalisme comme mode économique est basé sur le fait que les facteurs économiques opèrent au sein d’une arène plus large que celle que les entités sont en mesure de contrôler” (Wallerstein, 1974, p.348). World-system theory seeks to show how shifts in the center of the European world-economy correspond to shifts in the center of political power within the modern world-system. The cycle of the succession of hegemonic powers thus has a material basis. Braudel, Wallerstein and Arrighi, however, do not agree on the economic cycle that determines this succession. Arrighi distinguishes the systemic cycles of capital accumulation from the secular trend and the

Kondratieff cycle to which Braudel and Wallerstein attach great importance. According to Arrighi “ le cycle des prix séculaire et le cycle systémique d’accumulation du capital sont complètement désynchronisés” (Arrighi, 1994, p.7). Only the latter are, according to him, properly capitalist phenomena and allow the study of the “succession des regime à travers lesquels l’économie-monde capitalistes’ estétendu” (Arrighi, 1994, p.10).

The list of criticisms being long, we will limit ourselves to a few cases. In fact, in historical sociology, Skocpol engaged in an in-depth critique of Wallerstein's methodology. She particularly criticized his choice of the world-system as the main unit of analysis (Skocpol and Somers, 1980). Tilly also argues that Wallerstein underestimates the role played by war in the formation of European states (Tilly, 1992). These critics doubt that the mode of extraction of surpluses proceeds more from the world-system than from concrete class struggles.

#### 4. The practice of Marxism after Lenin.

##### *4.1. Marxism under the influence of the Zhdanov doctrine.*

Lenin’s successor at the head of the USSR, Joseph Stalin (1879-1953), claimed that it is possible to build socialism in a single country, thanks to the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the support of the communist parties of other countries. Nevertheless, during the Second World War, he negotiated with his allies, Great Britain and the United States, a partition of Europe that allowed the USSR to impose communism on the countries bordering its western border.<sup>129</sup> This expansion of communism into Eastern Europe was done in 1947, through the Zhdanov doctrine, which postulated that due to the rise of the first socialist state as a major military power, the logic of monopolistic capitalism would inexorably lead to a war between the two social systems. The imperialist bloc, led by the United States, was preparing to launch a war against the champions of peace, the socialist bloc, led by the USSR (Jdanov, 1947).

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<sup>129</sup> Entente conclue lors des traités de Moscou de 1943 et de Yalta e 1945.

In his famous denunciation of Stalin's crimes in 1956, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) also attacked the Zhdanov doctrine. Alleging that the advent of nuclear weapons and the balance of terror had made a war between the two social systems unthinkable, Khrushchev disavowed Stalinism and proceeded to revise Marxism-Leninism. Three theses in particular characterized the Soviet revisionism, resulting from the Khrushchev report presented in 1956 to the XXth Congress of the CPSU : the proletarian revolution is not necessary, socialism can be established in a peaceful way, by the electoral way ; the dictatorship of the proletariat is not an inescapable stage of the construction of socialism, it is compatible with the existence of certain capitalist principles ; the communist states must develop a policy of peaceful coexistence with the West, because of the nuclear threat. (Khrushchev, 1976).

Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev (1908-1982), added to this new revisionist policy the thesis of the limited sovereignty of socialist states, designed to justify the intervention of the Soviet Red Army in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (Kubalkova et Cruikshank, 1980). This intervention ended the "Printemps de Prague."<sup>130</sup> Yuri Andropov (1914-1984) and Constantin Chernenko (1911-1985) continued along the ideological path laid out by Leonid Brezhnev during their short stays in power.

#### ***4.2. Marxism in the era of Mikhail Gorbachev.***

In March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev (1931-2022), succeeded Constantin Chernenko as General Secretary and took over the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) and the state. When Gorbachev came to power, the Soviet system was collapsing from all sides. The economy was falling into ruin and was lagging behind the economies of Western countries in an unprecedented way. The CPSU was going through a major internal crisis with the death of three of its General Secretaries in the space of 18 months. The state apparatus and the Party organs were sclerotic due to the degeneration of the cadres and the pervasive corruption in society. The Red Army, which was the

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<sup>130</sup> « Printemps de Prague » mouvement de réformes visant à réintroduire certains principes libéraux capitalistes dans le fonctionnement économique et politique du système tchèque.

flagship of the USSR, was facing a major crisis of prestige with the failure of the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the American introduction of the Pershing II missiles in Western Europe, the blunder involving the Korean airliner in 1983 and the technological backwardness in terms of armaments. Ronald Reagan's rise to power re-launched the arms race and the Cold War.<sup>131</sup> (Thom, 1991) Finally, a serious political and social crisis hit Poland and called into question the unity of the communist movement in Eastern Europe. It was thus in this political, economic and social stagnation that Gorbachev took over the leadership of the CPSU in March 1985.

Gorbachev was the first General Secretary of the CPSU who was born after the 1917 revolution and who did not owe his political rise to Stalin. The first significant event in his political career was the XXth Congress in 1956. Indeed, Gorbachev entered the administration and the functions of the Party in August 1955. His career really took off with Khrouchchev's reformist current and his de-Stalinization program (Malia, 1955). The ultimate goal of the new thinking was not to put an end to the international victory of socialism, but to consolidate the country's economy in order to return later to the fundamental objectives of socialism (Soutou, 2001). In order to reform their economy, the Soviets hoped to obtain Western capital and technologies. This need was therefore the catalyst for the new foreign policy thinking.

With these goals in mind, Gorbachev extended an invitation to President Ronald Reagan to restart disarmament talks for the first time since 1979. The two great power leaders met successively at summits in Geneva in 1985, Reykjavik in 1987. The main topics of discussion revolved around strategic weapons, missile deployment in Europe, denuclearization, Star Wars (SDI) and the 1972 ABM Treaty. These discussions culminated in the INF agreement of December 1987, which eliminated all medium-range missiles (500 to 5,000 km) in Europe (Soutou, 2001). Moreover, this expectation was asymmetrical, since the USSR agreed to get rid of twice as many missiles as the Americans (1,752 for the Russians and 869 for the United States)

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<sup>131</sup> Françoise THOM, 1991, *Le Moment Gorbatchev*, Paris, Hachette, pp.14-63.

(Werth, 2001). Despite the asymmetry of this expectation, the Soviet Union obtained the withdrawal of the Pershing II missiles that directly threatened its territory.

Gorbachev abandoned revisionism in favor of liberalism. He embarked on a process of reforms characterized by the reintroduction of market economy principles (*perestroika*), democratization of the political system (*glasnost*), and peaceful cooperation with the United States and Western Europe, reforms that led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Angola, Ethiopia, Namibia, the border with China and Afghanistan before February 1989 (Malia, 1995). In addition, the Soviets withdrew their support for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Cuba, and pressured the Vietnamese to withdraw from Cambodia (Malia, 1995). By the end of 1989, Gorbachev had ended the Third Worldist adventure that Brezhnev had launched in the 1960s-1970s. The USSR completely abandoned its concept of exporting the communist revolution to the world and thus another component of the Soviet security doctrine.

Gorbachev's demilitarization campaign continued with his speech at the UN in December 1988 and his commitment to reduce the number of military personnel stationed in Eastern Europe. The General Secretary pledged to reduce the Soviet Union's military capacity by 500,000 troops in two years, including 50,000 troops, 5,300 tanks, and 24 tactical nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe (Gorbachev, 1997).

**4.3. *Marxism facing the revisionist theses.***

The contestation of the ideological authority of Moscow will be more or less radical and it will be justified by diverse motivations, often even opposed. Thus, Marshal Josip Broz, known as Tito (1882-1990), made Yugoslavia an independent state of the Soviet bloc, notably because Stalin rejected his model of socialism based on self-management rather than on collective state ownership. The Hungarian Communists, under the leadership of Imre Nagy (1896-1958), and the Czech Communists, under the influence of Alexander Dubcek (1921-1992), tried unsuccessfully in 1956 and 1968 to establish a socialist model more liberal than that of the USSR. The Albania of EnverHoxha (1908-1985) and the China of Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976) broke off

their relations with Moscow in 1960 to protest against Khrouchchev's denial of Stalin's legacy.

Mao Tse-tung was so outraged by what he called the Soviet "capitulation" that the doctrine of peaceful coexistence became one of the direct causes of the Sino-Soviet breakup in 1960, and led China to promote Mao's "*théorie des troismondes*" (Deng Xiao-Ping, 1985, pp.87-95). The central thesis of this theory was that the USSR had betrayed Marxism and had become a "social-imperialist" state, which undermined the global peace now threatened by two rival hegemonic projects. On the one hand, US-led imperialism was attempting to subjugate the entire world to capitalist exploitation; on the other hand, USSR-led "social imperialism" was launching the COMECON states in a quest for world hegemony and the destruction of all national independence and culture. Between these two "worlds" stood the rest of humanity with only one reliable interpreter: the People's Republic of China.

The Maoist revision of the theory of revolution made another significant contribution to the Marxist analysis of global power relations from the 1960s onwards. Since the proletariat constitutes a tiny proportion of the population of the Third World, Maoist doctrine advocated the mobilization of the peasant masses and the building of its base in rural areas. Thus, by "encircling" the large urban centers, the communist parties would succeed in overthrowing the pro-imperialist power structures there. Mao's military writings have inspired many guerrilla wars on three continents. These doctrines and policies reveal that the Marxist debate after Lenin's death was frozen to the point where the only discussions that took place within the socialist countries were on questions of military strategy and tactics.

## Conclusion

The failure and disappearance of the majority of socialist and communist regimes and the collapse of the Soviet empire during the 1991's, the enlargement of the European Union (EU) and NATO to Eastern Europe, the rise of new economic power poles in Asia, first and foremost China and India, the events of September 11, 2001, armed conflicts, the Arab Spring, etc., are aspects of the changes in

international relations that have discredited the ideas of the founders and successors of Marxism.

However, although given for dead, Marxist theory remains in the literature of International Relations, especially that of the neo-Marxists. Two reasons in particular can be given for this fact. On the one hand, as Imre Lakatos points out, “ même si une théorie est infirmée par les faits, elle continuera à être utilisée pendant une longue période en raison de l’attachement des chercheurs à ses valeurs et de l’intérêt qu’ils ont à défendre ces dernières ” (Lakatos, 1994, p.226-228). On the other hand, if the Marxist theory of socialism has been invalidated by the failure of real socialisms, the Marxist analysis of the laws and contradictions of capitalist development is in various ways corroborated by the current dynamics of capitalist globalization. As Robert Gilpin has pointed out : “ Le marxisme survit en tant qu’instrument d’analyse et de critique du capitalisme et il continuera à survivre aussi longtemps que les lacunes du capitalisme identifiées par Marx et ses successeurs persisteront : les cycles de croissance et de récession du capitalisme, l’extension de la pauvreté parallèlement à la croissance de la richesse et l’intense rivalité des économies capitalistes pour le partage marché ” (Gilpin, dans Ethier, 2001, p.48).

Despite the contribution of many neo-Marxists, Marxism will remain highly criticized for its reductionism and determinism, making the economic aspect the only factor in all social relations and therefore in all conflicts. However, from the point of international relations, Marxism remains an important methodological tool for analyzing capitalism, the dynamics at work and anticipating international developments. It is also a tool to transform and act on reality, to elaborate a program and a revolutionary policy for the workers, for all the oppressed.

The bourgeoisie is a class whose economic system is international and its domination is also international. Therefore, even if the immediate struggle of the working class begins on the national terrain, the destiny of the revolution will be defined in the last instance in the international arena. Hence the importance for the working class to rely on Marxist theses to develop a scientific knowledge and analysis of the international situation and its dynamics, in order to serve its own

revolutionary interests. From this point of view, a Marxist proletarian analysis of the international situation should deal with: the international economy, in its different aspects (financial, production branches, technological innovations, natural resources, etc.); the interstate relations; the different military, security and ecological aspects.

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