

The Crisis of Socialism and the Third World
by Franz J. Hinkellammert
As Translated by David Berger

I should like to work out several theses on the change in the relationship between the countries of the Third World and the First World. This crisis has been strongly exacerbated by the crisis of socialism in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. It involves a profound change that took place in the decade of the eighties but had been gradually compounding in the prior decades.

THESIS ONE

It is my belief--and this constitutes the first thesis--that a transformation has occurred in world capitalism in recent times that came to the fore during the most dramatic moment in the crisis of socialism; the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. At that moment I was in the Federal Republic of Germany and for me there existed a symbolic connection between that collapse and the massacre of the Jesuit community in San Salvador happening only one week later. What struck me first of all was the fact that the European media of communication laid stress exclusively on the fall of the Wall, while that other event showing so clearly what had come to mean the Third World, was reduced to a few marginal reports over the radio and in some papers. It involved a "liquidation" in the classical totalitarian style of the thirties when one of the centers of liberation theology in the Western world was being "eliminated." The Western media reacted to this event in the same manner as the totalitarian media had reacted in the thirties and, led by the government of the USA, (The latter, through the FBI, kidnapped the most important witness and forced her through threats to change her testimony), collaborated to conceal the happening. One month later took place the military intervention in Panama which was reliant on the consensus of all the Western societies. The news concerning that intervention, which was almost non-existent thanks to the media, also reflected the classical totalitarian methods of the thirties: In the afternoon of the first day of the intervention the journalist of the Spanish newspaper EL PAIS, was killed: this gave an effective signal to all of the media present there.

There is no necessary causal relationship between the two events: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the massacre of the Jesuits in San Salvador, although the timing is noticeable. Few historical events in the recent past were as favorable as this one was for the massacre that took place in San Salvador. Yet, although the relationship may not be a causative one, there exists an undeniable symbolic relation. This proves to us that a capitalism which during the decades between the thirties and the fifties, attempted to appear as a capitalism with a human face, no longer needs to do so. It can now once more appear as a capitalism without a human face. The world as it appears and is broadcast at the present time is one in which there is but one overlord and in which there is but one system. It is a world with a single empire reaching everywhere--an empire covering and enclosing the entire world. All of the sudden

it has become clear that there remains no place of refuge. No such shelter is possible in view of the sole empire; this empire is omnipresent: it has obtained total power and knows this. Everywhere this empire broadcasts that it has all the power. The self-proclaimed "open society" has established the first closed society from which there is no escape.

The meaning of this is that for the first time the Third World finds itself completely isolated. In its conflicts with the First World of the metropolitan capitalistic countries, it can no longer count on support from any other country. It can no longer resort to any Second World that could in any manner share interests with it. To the extent that the Second World of the socialist countries continues to exist, it has withdrawn from solidarity with the Third World and has become part of the North opposed to the South. As the saying goes in many parts of Latin America: The Second World cannot prosper unless it is admitted by the First World to that feast where the Third World is being devoured.

Added to this is a very profound conviction whose importance is undeniable: The consciousness that there is being an alternative is being lost. It appears that there are no longer any alternatives and the Totality, the form in which the First World represents itself, is the expression of that state of consciousness. We are the world of the Absolute Idea.

The crisis of socialism did not just rob the Third World of the possibility of finding common ground in its conflicts with the First World. It has made it impossible for the Third World to call upon socialism in that imaginary field of seeking for alternatives. It can no longer have recourse to socialism in order to show that an alternative really does exist, however imperfect such an alternative may turn out. It can no longer declare that such alternative may exist: that it can be improved and that it has a future; that would confirm that it may be possible to have a different future, to have a future different from the present one.

The capitalism of the decades of the fifties and sixties was one of economic and social reforms which included a concern for the development of the Third World countries, so as not to allow for the possibility of alternative movements. But it appears that today's capitalism expresses the notion that there exist no such alternatives. And so, it has once more taken on the form of unbridled capitalism, a capitalism without a human face.

Almost all of us know that we are in a cataclysmic voyage toward the abyss, which capitalism does not even attempt to apply a brake to. It asks of us whether we know of an alternative but at the same time it continues to do everything to make it appear that there is no alternative to this road towards death.

Here is our first thesis: The crisis of socialism has very deeply weakened the Third World and at the same time threatened the survival of humanity itself.

THESIS TWO

The phenomenon of the weakening of the Third World is complemented by another one which we may discuss under the question: Is the First World still in need of the Third World?

We know that the production methods of the Third World were developed on the basis that its work force would be used in the production and the export of its materials. The importance of the Third World has consisted in the supply of its raw materials produced by the existing labor force. Where there has been an insufficient labor force it managed to obtain it by enforced slave labor. Such raw materials were the basis for the development of the present day developed countries.

We are today witnessing undoubtedly certain tendencies towards the loss of the Third World in the production of raw materials. Many "natural" raw materials are being replaced by "synthetical" raw materials, so that this renders superfluous the work force that made the former possible. Certain raw materials continue to be produced in the Third World countries but more and more it becomes less possible to make use of the total work force available for the production of the same.

This is bringing about a restructuring of the Third World. From a world in which the raw materials were exploited with the existing work force, there has arisen one containing a population which has become superfluous. Contrary to what happened up to the last one hundred years, we are confronted with a situation that, from the standpoint of the requirements of the First World, means the existence of a superfluous population. The Third World, its oceans, its air, its nature, are still needed but only as a dumping ground for poisonous refuse. Although its raw materials are still needed, they are losing all relevance. The Third World still continues to be of key importance for the growth of the First World, (Translator's note: the passage enclosed in pencil brackets on page 2 of the original, seems to be a garbled copy of the original source material mentioned at the end of the article). What is no longer needed is a large portion of the population of the Third World.

The First World does not in fact withdraw from the Third World but is now developing an image of it as a world in which there exists a population that is superfluous. These superfluous peoples, viewed in terms of a population explosion, are increasingly regarded as a danger and no longer as objects that can be exploited. As a matter of fact, the present technical development has taken on a form which does not permit the exploitation of that population. The structure of capitalism has become such that it can no longer exploit the world's population. Nevertheless, it considers superfluous that population that it cannot exploit. Such population is viewed as an over-population that has no *raison d'être*, but is just there. It is a capitalism that wants to have nothing to do with that population.

The concept of exploitation is presently changing. As is well known, the classical idea of exploitation refers to an available work force effectively employed in production, the product of its labor being expropriated. It concerns the concept of exploitation as developed in the Marxist tradition. However, now a situation has arisen in which a people can no longer be used for capitalist production; where there is no intention of using it; nor any possibility of doing so in the future. A world is arising in which one must acquire the privilege of being "exploited." As a matter of

fact, this concept of exploitation made its appearance at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe; that is to say, in a world when, during periods of very good economic conditions, there was full employment of the work force. Unemployment was therefore a problem of the ups and downs of the economy. Under the present-day capitalism, however, this situation has changed. It is a state of affairs in which ever increasing segments of the Third World peoples are no longer "exploited" in that sense of the term. The more the population appears to be superfluous, the less valid is that concept of exploitation. Its importance has therefore largely been lost. This may likewise be seen in the consciousness of the workers themselves. More and more the worker does not feel as one being exploited when he realizes that he enjoys a privilege as compared to those others who have become superfluous. All relationships with respect to exploitation have changed. This has likewise happened in the industrial world but it has reached more pronounced signs in the Third World.

This also signifies that the Third World population is completely devoid of power. He who is superfluous cannot engage in strikes, has no power of negotiation, cannot offer threats. The proud slogan of the worker in the nineteenth century, "All wheels will stop turning if your strong arm wills it," can no longer be raised by the Third World peoples, although it seemed to be true during the time of the oil crisis. Nevertheless, this concerned certain very restricted countries, under exceptional conditions and a likewise exceptional time. The same is true for the slogan: "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" This was expressed by groups who felt that they had the power to negotiate, born of unity. Today this slogan too has collapsed. The Third World peoples have such a minimal negotiating power that they cannot offer their participation. The phenomenon of the superfluosity of these peoples has turned into a situation in which their very existence is threatened.

This constitutes the second thesis: The metropolitan countries of the First World continue to have need of the Third World countries, but they no longer need its peoples.

In this situation the Third World countries are losing the capacity to carry out any development policy.

In the present situation the sole possibility for development in the Third World countries is one related to the world market; this means finally, to the market of the metropolitan, industrialized countries. Such a relationship is restricted to the production of raw materials. In spite of these important alternatives, there has nevertheless developed an ever-increasing competition among the Third World countries for these ever-decreasing markets. The result has been a fall in the prices. With larger exports in physical terms, the provision of foreign exchange is restricted or decreased. For this reason, on the basis of the traditional production structure, the development of the Latin-American countries or of the Third World in general, becomes less and less possible. In order for such development--with integration--to be achieved, it would have to be based on the rapid growth of industrial production integrated with the world-wide division of labor.

We have indications that the metropolitan countries do not accept this type of development. On the contrary, we are observing a systematic destruction of all steps that might lead to that goal. In spite of the fact that this or that small country might escape this fate dictated by the metropolitan countries, the clear tendency in the Third World is the destruction or standstill of the industries that arose in the decades from the fifties to the seventies. The metropolitan countries do not see any hope for advantage in the further development of the Third World but rather see many disadvantages.

The problems of the world environment are entering more and more into this calculation. This is the situation: It is understood that a marked meaningful development in the Third World can no longer be a copy of the development experienced by the present developed countries. The environment would not permit it. It is likewise understood that any considerable development would force the First World itself to reshape its entire productive structure and its technological plans and to subject them to the condition of the survival of mankind as a whole within the framework of the present natural world. Inasmuch as there are no prospects for this to happen, the First World is preparing to make use of the destruction of the environment of the Third World for its own advantage in order to be able to maintain itself for as long as possible. We are confronted with the "heroism" of collective suicide.

Herein lies the importance of the foreign debt of the Third World, which permits the First World countries to keep in check the developmental possibilities of the Third World countries, so as to be able to prevent its success. This foreign debt has been transformed into a decisive instrument for dictating the economic and developmental policies of the indebted Third World countries. On observing the tendency of these imposed structural adjustments, it is noted of course that the metropolitan imposition is to prevent the underdeveloped countries from entering into the world-wide division of labor by means of industrial products.

The foreign debt of the Third World is an ideal instrument for achieving that goal. The development of the Third World is suppressed in the name of goals which directly and apparently have nothing to do with it. The objective is obscured: what is visible is the debt of these countries and their obligations to pay it. The result, nevertheless, is that the Third World countries are forced into a desperate production of raw materials that cancels its potential for industrial development.

To sum up in a few words this frenetic policy of the First World, it is this: Never again Japan! Japan happened once but it will never happen again! Or does one seriously think that the First World will be ready to accept a Japan of the size of Brazil or India?

This, then, is our third thesis: The metropolitan capitalistic countries have lost interest in a policy of the development of the Third World and have resorted to blocking it within the framework of all of its possibilities.

Accordingly, we have three theses:

-Capitalism has once more turned into naked capitalism; it no

longer fears that alternatives may exist: consequently, it no longer seeks compromises.

-From the vantage point of the metropolitan countries, the Third World is an economic necessity but there is no need for its peoples.

-A development based on the industrial integration of the world market is considered to be a threat to the countries of the center. The foreign debt of the Third World serves them as an instrument for the regulation and control and eventually the blocking of this type of development.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF SOLIDARITY

At the present time there exists a solidarity that is different from the workers solidarity of the nineteenth century. Workers' solidarity was based on the power of the workingmen themselves that was the result of their unity. Essentially this made possible a working class solidarity to confront capital as the destructive power. The solidarity of a people transformed into a superfluous people can no longer evince such a character; it does not constitute a negotiating power. Nevertheless, it is likewise a solidarity of mutual aid, just as was the workers solidarity. Still, in the last decade or two it no longer constitutes a power. It is a solidarity of the poor and not of the proletarians.

It can constitute a power only to the extent that there may arise a solidarity between groups which are integrated within society with those which are excluded. It cannot be limited to the solidarity of a fighting group; it must be a human solidarity that goes far beyond any groups but, as a first condition, it must include the debarred ones. It means solidarity as the preferential option for the poor.

As we have seen, the tendencies of present day capitalism not only involve the negation of solidarity but in addition, the very possibility of it. At the present time solidarity presupposes a confrontation with capitalism for the requirement of a just society that is participatory and ecologically sustainable. Solidarity today would be but a chimera if it does not put into action this alternative to present day capitalism and to its destructive tendencies. Nevertheless, similarly, by negating the possibility for such alternatives, capitalism negates the very possibility of human solidarity. In fighting to the death against all of these possible alternatives, it struggles to the death against the very possibility of solidarity. The bourgeoisie declares the latter as something illusory, a sort of atavism; for if all of the alternatives are illusory, then so is solidarity. So, then, the very intention of supporting solidarity is being persecuted as smacking of ignorance or crime. Solidarity is being persecuted as a destructive "utopia."

Present day bourgeois thought is regards solidarity as something diabolical. To the extent that this solidarity expresses what in the Christian tradition stands for love for your neighbor, it now considers this sermon of love as a diabolical preachment, as Lucifer's temptation.

All this involves an extreme negation of any human dignity.

Solidarity and the love for your neighbor being denounced as diabolical, so is all claim to human dignity. In bourgeois society even Jesus is at present transformed into a demon whom one must fight against.

In denying solidarity, human dignity is denied. This is not a mere declaration of abstract principles but real matters. Human dignity is based on the notion of the possibility of living with dignity. A recognition of this is likewise a recognition of the right for a dignified life. This means; to eat, to have shelter, education, health, etc. If this is not recognized as a human right, there is no possible recognition of human dignity.

Nevertheless, the goal of living with dignity is a possible alternative only if an alternative does exist. If the possibility for any alternative is denied, man is denied the possibility of living with dignity. In that way dignity is denied him in all its concrete forms and human dignity is transformed into an abstract principle, without any content. This has become clear: Human beings who have become superfluous and who consequently are considering themselves as superfluous, no longer possess human dignity; a fact that will not be changed by thousands of declarations. The exploited ones are violated in their human dignity but what is even worse, they are not even accorded any dignity that could be violated. This will explain the remarkable name given in the West to all liberation movements; Cancer! I cannot think of a single liberation movement which has not been designated as a cancer either in Washington or in Europe: a cancer to be erased! This is the way that the bourgeois world relates to liberation movements. The last time that "cancer" was mentioned in Latin America was in reference to Nicaragua and the Sandinista Movement. However, it was likewise applied to Libya, to Chile and previously--this was perhaps the first instance--to Indonesia in 1965. The word "cancer" substituted the one that was essential for the Nazis: "parasite." It referred to the same phenomena. The use of the expression "cancer" is universal for all liberation movements in the Third World and, beyond these, for the repression of all types of dissidence.

If the relationship between the existence of alternatives is taken seriously, then it may be seen as well that the struggle of bourgeois society against any alternative for the purpose of destroying it, is likewise a battle for the destruction of human dignity itself. Human beings are not given the right of living in dignity. They may so live and live happily if they manage to obtain on the market the space for achieving this. If they do not succeed, the market confirms that they neither possess human dignity nor do they have the right of claiming it. Now therefore, in the process of the destruction of the alternatives and the creation of superfluous man, the attempt is made to destroy the very human feeling of dignity to such a degree that these human beings thus made superfluous, regard themselves as being superfluous. It is my belief that every present ideological struggle turns about this point. It forms the content of psychological warfare. I also believe that the crisis of socialism has opened up the possibility of bringing this negation of human dignity to a high point.

This is not only for the process of "creating superfluous man"

in the Third World. A similar process is taking place in the First World although at a more limited level. Basically speaking, the psychological warfare which is omnipresent at least in the Third World, tries to convince people made superfluous, that they are indeed so. This has as a consequence that they destroy one another mutually instead of building solidarity. I believe that Nietzsche was the first one who scrupulously described this phenomenon. It is surprising to what extent he knew that the person made superfluous must consider himself as such, so as to destroy himself and one another.

These types of situations may be observed at the present time in Latin American societies, such as in the Dominican Republic, in Honduras, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, etc.

This process allows us to see that today solidarity possesses features different from previous ones, besides the fact that today it has taken on once more a central importance. It is not a matter solely of calling for unity and mutual assistance. It is a matter of completely rebuilding a human dignity whose very roots have been denied. It is necessary to make clear that the negation of alternatives is the negation of human dignity and that we insist on such dignity.

It is not a matter of having an alternative worked out on the spot. Is the genocide of the Third World justified because the people--the victims--fail to have worked out an alternative for the countries of the Third and First Worlds? If at the present time we do not have an alternative worked out against the destruction of the Amazon or of the Himalayas, is such a destruction legitimate? We know that such a destruction of man and of nature must cease and it is everyone's problem to seek an alternative. Capitalism has embarked on the collective suicide of all humanity. Is this legitimate because no one has worked out an alternative? It is necessary to work out!

Many proposed alternatives have failed. Nevertheless, I cannot see any reason for the triumph that the bourgeoisie is celebrating today. Every failed alternative is the loss of hope of being able to escape the collective suicide that bourgeois society is preparing. Moreover, alternatives are not worked out speedily at a congress or in a solitary office. It is becoming more difficult every time to work out alternatives because every alternative has to include technical considerations that must not be worked out superficially. Moreover, the bourgeoisie has monopolized the very technical capacity for elaboration.

What we demonstrate is that there will be no human survival if no alternative is found to the system that so vociferously is being proclaimed. Alternatives can arise only when all of the world's population is clamoring for them, knowing that they are in need of them. Alternatives are not produced like sausages which are then being offered. There must be the realization that we shall be lost without them; only then will they be found. There will never be an alternative in the form of a recipe: an alternative can appear only when humanity arrives at the knowledge that it has need of it.

Nevertheless, the basic elements for such an alternative are known. It concerns a new, world-wide economic and financial order of raw materials markets; the reconstruction of an economic policy

on the employment and distribution of incomes; a policy of universal health and education; the establishment of an ecological order channeling the markets in such a manner that economic growth will respect to a large extent the limits of natural reproduction. However, an alternative can arise from this only when it is effectively undertaken by all, to be introduced in the daily exercise of power.

At the present time one cannot talk about a class alternative; we are dealing with an alternative for all of humanity. But the search for it and the insistence for it, continues to be a class problem. It is a fight by classes from above which imposes a renunciation of alternatives. The bourgeoisie no longer has an adversary in the form of a class. Nevertheless, it continues to be the dominant class behaving as in a class struggle although the latter is only one from above. It is a matter of dissolving that position of the bourgeoisie so as to be enabled to clearly discuss and to act. If in this respect the bourgeoisie does not yield, does not give up its class struggle, there will be no alternative. It has the power of destroying anyone and at the present time there is no way of defeating it on the same level of the class struggle. If it does not give in, we are at the abyss.

What remains only is a resistance in order to reform our society. I wish to conclude with a few words by Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1944: "It is better to do something than to do nothing." This is something we have to do.

(Taken from the magazine Dialogo Social, No. 236, January-March 1991)

(Translation of poem in box at bottom of page 1 of the original):

We are still there with our hands avid
For our flowers, our colors, our song birds.
We still hope to be seated at the table,
All united to break the bread,
There is still a tiny, sacred corner
In our hearts that does not share
Such inhumanity, such insane bestiality.
We can still strangle hatred and impotence.
We are still alive.