



## Challenging Eurocentrism

by Juliet Ucelli and Dennis O'Neil

### WHY TALK ABOUT EUROCENTRISM NOW?

Ongoing battles over the content of social studies classes in public schools and the canon in liberal arts education are thrusting the term "eurocentrism" toward the mainstream of political discourse in the United States. It is a concept which has been fairly easy for those of us on the left to become comfortable with, but that sense of ease could actually pose a problem of complacency for revolutionary socialists. The fact is that the critique of eurocentrism is still in its early stages, and that the extraordinarily pervasive hold this framework has on the thinking of everyone raised in Western societies is not fully appreciated. And the problem of what kind of worldview it is to be replaced with has barely been considered.

The point, then, is that eurocentrism will not be understood, neutralized or superseded without considerable effort and, as shown by the current counterattack waged by the bourgeoisie against "political correctness," without fierce struggle.

A good starting point in thinking about eurocentrism is the recent spate of books produced by African, North American and European academics. They have thrown down the gauntlet inside classics, comparative linguistics, economic history, sociology and other academic disciplines. This recent scholarship builds on the pioneering work of African American scholars like C.L.R. James and W.E.B. Dubois, whose work was marginalized by white supremacist academia, yet studied continuously over the past fifty years by organic intellectuals of color and some white leftists. Another foundation is the insistence on the centrality of culture, psychology and the internalization of oppression coming from African thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral and Cheikh Anta Diop.

To some extent, a critique of eurocentrism is implicit in the opposition to imperialism which (however flawed) has characterized the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement since the time of Lenin. However, at least until Mao's writings became an influence, European socialists generally grasped more easily the concepts of the super-exploitation and victimization of non-European peoples and had more difficulty recognizing their scientific



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### A Look at Recent Works:

*Eurocentrism, Class and Nation, and Delinking*, by Samir Amin; *Black Athena*, by Martin Bernal; *Before Europe's Hegemony*, by Janet Abu-Lughod; and *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement*, by the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain.

achievements and cultural contributions. The concept of eurocentrism as currently used pays more attention to precisely this aspect: the distortion of the consciousness and self-knowledge of humanity by the insistence of people of European descent that all valid, "universal" scientific knowledge, economic progress, political structures and works of art flow only from their ancestors. Or, in its more subtle form, eurocentrism acknowledges contributions from non-European cultures but says that if they're important enough, they'll be subsumed within the Western legacy; that the current global cultural marketplace will automatically absorb and disseminate any new cultural products of universal validity.

The Eurocentric version of human development is a key ideological underpinning of white supremacy. It serves to legitimize Euro-North American domination by claiming that it (also known as modernity, technological progress, the free market) advances the best interests of all humanity. When necessary, this belief in Euro-North American cultural superiority must also be reinforced by brute force. Conservative columnist George Will portrays the relationship of the Eurocentric knowledge system to naked domination quite candidly in his justification for the war against Iraq:

"This is, in part, a didactic war[!]. [Iraq was] transgressing values most clearly enunciated by the United States, the symbol of modern political values and cultural modernity...The hope [is that the war will] pry parts of Arabia into participation in the modernity that is capable of such technological prowess and moral purpose. Both that prowess and that purpose derive from freedom...The mighty U.S. sword guarantees the pre-eminence of the American pen."

In the United States, the developing critique of eurocentrism emphasizes consciousness, i.e. ways of thinking, values, works of art and theories, and does not yet address social institutions and structures. This orientation toward consciousness is doubtless influenced by the greater mainstream recognition, over the past few years, of the contributions to cultural production by people of African, Asian and Native descent. While people of color were always the unacknowledged creators of much U.S. popular music, art and fashion styles, filmmakers like Spike Lee, fashion designers like the late Willi Smith, culture critics and trendsetters like bell hooks, Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates Jr., novelists like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, and multi-genre musical masterminds like Quincy Jones demand a new level of recognition. These cultural producers get authorship credits, have their names above the title, or even own the company. It is not accidental that most of these figures are African American, because of the historical and structural primacy of racial slavery in constituting the U.S. social formation and its ideology, and the historically key role of African Americans in shaping the culture which never could completely subjugate them.

On the one side, the prominence of African Americans in the cultural sphere forces masses of white people, whose consciousness about racism is contradictory and fragmentary, to recognize that people of color produce culture, even some of the culture which white people like best and try to imitate. A white person can wear Air Jordans

and admire individual Blacks and that admiration is an opening for identifying with people of color and questioning their oppression. But lacking a coherent critique of racism, that white person might still be quite racist.

On the other side, since any overt political opposition by Black, Latino, Asian and Native peoples in the United States has been subject to such murderous repression by the state, their opposition gets pushed into—and sometimes contained by—a cultural form. Kinte cloth, dreadlocks and “40 Acres and a Mule” warmup jackets don’t constitute a program for liberation, but they are a less dangerous way for a Black person to assert collective identity and pride than joining an overtly political, radical group.

If you’re still wondering what’s the point of reexamining of history and social theories (including our own left wing ones) once we

appreciation for diversity, a coherent story of human evolution and a moral philosophy of history that enables them to situate themselves as responsible global actors?

### SAMIR AMIN AND THE CRITIQUE OF EUROCENTRIC MARXIST THEORY

We’ll start with Samir Amin, the Egyptian economic historian, both because his conceptual framework encompasses the greatest historical reach, and because his project is to help construct a genuine historical materialist theory of social evolution by eliminating Eurocentric bias. He believes that “all human societies have gone through and will go through stages that, despite their diversity of form, are basically similar. The problem is to correctly identify these stages, *on the basis of human history as a whole.*” Therefore, in

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acknowledge that Europeans didn’t invent everything good, well, there are several reasons. Our theory of imperialism certainly needs to develop its cultural dimension to better understand the ideological framework that legitimizes white supremacy. Further, if we want to create a world where no nation or region dominates another, it would help to understand how this domination arose and is perpetuated. If Europe didn’t subdue the world just because it was eternally culturally superior and rational as we learned in school, then *why* did it? How can we explain why cultures and economic systems which had many valuable features were destroyed? What can we learn from non-European cultures that can help us conceptualize and bring into being a truly egalitarian society? As educators and parents, how do we provide children of all backgrounds with an authentic (non-superior) pride in their own people, an

*Class and Nation: Historically and in the Current Crisis and Eurocentrism*, he challenges not only bourgeois history but also Marxist explanations of the succession of modes of production.

In *Class and Nation*, he challenges a schema propagated in countless Marxist study groups—that there are four stages of history, or four modes of production: primitive communism/barbarism, ancient slavery, feudalism and capitalism. China and India have been considered weird forms of feudalism because they were less fragmented, and had highly developed central state structures. To deal with this inconsistency, some European and American socialist historians drew on a few references in Marx’s early writings to speculate about a separate “Asiatic mode of production” or “Asiatic despotism,” characterized by a complex state structure, infinitely self-reproducing small so-

cial units, and above all, stagnation. Only European feudalism, therefore, had the “dynamicism” capable of engendering capitalism.

Amin disagrees with both these versions and says that there is no such thing as the slave mode of production. How can we proclaim as an essential stage of human evolution a form of production which was predominant in such a small number of societies, and which coexisted with very different levels of development of the productive forces: from the city of Athens to Roman Sicily to Lower Iraq under the Abassids to the plantations of America? Further, says Amin, slavery is essentially an exceptional phenomenon that can never define a mode of production, or constitute the primary form of labor exploitation for very long. Because of its very brutality, it barely reproduces a labor force and thus almost always entails external raiding and dies out when the source of new slaves dries up. So, for Amin, slavery (strictly speaking, the sale of human beings as commodities and not, for example, the temporary enforced servitudes of captives and others it is sometimes confused with) is a brutal form of exploitation which always serves to produce a commodity for long-distance trade. Slavery has occurred sporadically under the two major forms of class society: what he calls the tributary (Greece and Rome) and the capitalist (the American plantations).

### A REVISED SCHEMA OF MODES OF PRODUCTION

Amin believes that the attachment to the idea of a slave mode of production rests on uncritical acceptance of sacred Marxist texts in lieu of any real empirical research. It is also a convenient if unconscious way to uphold Europe’s development as historically advanced and superior (the Greco-Roman slave mode engenders the feudal mode which engenders capitalism). The concept of the “Asiatic mode of production,” he surmises, gained currency as the European Communist parties were seeking ways to dismiss Maoism as merely the continuation of a despotic state structure and communal property under a different name.

Amin proposes the following schema of modes of production: the communal, the tributary and the capitalist. The communal mode encompasses what we previously called primitive communism and barbarism, and is characterized by low productivity of labor and little surplus product and by the primacy of kinship relations like lineage, clan and tribe. What little surplus product exists may be centralized by a ruling group for collective use and redistributed according to the needs of reproduction, but it is not yet appropriated by a consolidated group for its own use, and there is not yet a state.

Amin offers the concept of the tributary mode to cover pre-capitalist societies with developed states and ruling classes: ancient Egypt, classical Greece and Rome, Medieval Europe and the Incas and Mayas in America and dynastic China. The term “tributary” comes from the fact that the surplus product is nakedly extracted in the form of tribute, not through economic exchange as in the capitalist marketplace. Production is essentially based on use-value, not exchange-value, and the product extracted by the exploiting class is a direct use value for this class—i.e. they want the actual product, the grain or cloth, they don’t just want it to sell it. There is some commodity production (and where there’s slavery, fairly widespread commodity production), but it is not universal, and labor power is not yet a commodity as it is under capitalism.

Since tribute cannot be extracted over an extended period solely by means of violence, the superstructure dominates in tributary societies. Usually a state or quasi-state religion legitimizes the exploitation and shores up social consensus. (Much of Part I of *Eurocentrism* is a detailed study of tributary ideology in different societies.) The final characteristic of this mode is that it appears to be stable or even stagnant, because there is no necessary internal drive to accumulate like the law of value engenders under capitalism. But in actuality, significant development of the productive forces did occur in tributary societies. And so did class struggle.

With his thesis of unequal development, Amin then proceeds to turn the usual explanation of why capitalism emerged in Europe

on its head. He puts forth, as a general tendency of social evolution on the most abstract level, that it is the society which is peripheral, less developed (i.e. has a lower productivity of labor) in a given mode of production which will go on to lead the way into the subsequent mode of production. Why? Because the advanced society is advantageously positioned, highly structured and inflexible, while the less advanced experiences the disadvantages and contradictions of the current mode more strongly, and is more flexible. Therefore, capitalism developed in Europe because European feudalism was a backward, peripheral form of the tributary mode: with political/territorial fragmentation, less unified ideology, and lower labor productivity.

### WHY DID CAPITALISM FIRST ARISE IN EUROPE?

(HINT: Not Because Europeans Were  
Eternally Culturally Superior)

While emphasizing that history moves in accordance with knowable laws, Samir Amin hastens to remind us that:

Each mode of production is characterized by its own contradictions and thus by its own specific laws of motion...But there are no laws of transition. Each transition involves the working out of a historical necessity...through the concrete interrelation of numerous specific contradictions within a social formation...  
(*Class and Nation*, p. 86-87).

In examining the rise of European hegemony, Janet Abu-Lughod emphasizes the role of individual, accidental events, the limits of predictability, and the arbitrariness of how we pose questions about history and attempt to answer them. Working from a world systems theory perspective in *Before Europe's Hegemony*, she writes eloquently and clearly, constantly posing in everyday language key methodological questions. She reminds us that there's no way to stand outside some context when you look at history, and therefore you need to triangulate. If the historian searches for the testimony of the people at the bottom, not only the victors, and compares many different versions of a historical event, some valid knowledge can emerge. Because we're always constructing history backwards—from our concerns of

today—we have to consciously decide where to start our inquiry in order to answer accurately the questions which we pose.

For example, most research on the rise of capitalism begins looking around the year 1400, when European hegemony is a predictable outcome. But 1250 to 1350 was a period of commercial revolution, and looking around in the year 1300, one would have predicted the continuation of the Indian Ocean/China trade network. Why did it fall? Why don't we ask why the previous trade nexus fell apart? (Much of her book meticulously documents the 8 regional overlapping sub-systems that approached being a partial world system in this period; no true world system existed before the rise of capitalism). And isn't it interesting, she notes, that we ask why the European half of the Roman Empire fell, and attribute it to external reasons (barbarian invasions), and why capitalism arose in Europe, and attribute it to internal reasons (superior culture, greater dynamism).

For Abu-Lughod, combinations of relatively accidental features in context determine an outcome, but not one which is necessarily predictable in advance. In the 11th and 12th century, China produced iron and steel by coal-powered techniques, had compass navigation, cannons and gunpowder. The medieval Mideast made better textiles than Europe, which imported their finished goods. Checks, investment partnerships, credit, double-entry bookkeeping were invented in 5th and 6th century Persia, long before they emerged in Italy. Government-issued paper currency appeared in 12th century Sung China. Viking sailors reached the Americas without restructuring Europe-Asia-Africa. Arab sailors sailed around Africa without making the Atlantic the core of world commerce. None of these productive and commercial advances led directly to capitalism.

Abu-Lughod believes that the crucial determinants in making Europe the center of capitalist development and of the first truly global world system were not any institutional or motivational characteristics of European culture. Rather, a combination of

geopolitical factors in other regions created the opportunity for Europe's rise, in synchronization with Europe's navigational mastery of the Atlantic and conquest of the Americas. These factors included the disintegration of prior trade routes to the East. For example, as the Pax Mongolica succumbed to renewed fighting after 1250, the roads connecting the Central Asia land route with the South China seaports no longer offered safe passage. Tamerlane's conquests of Arab Asia and the end of the Crusader state at Acre blocked the European-Persian Gulf link. The Black Death decimated populations from Central Asia to the Mediterranean, creating labor shortages and declines in production, while England and Northern Europe were less hard hit.

Together, all these events weakened previous regional power centers and trading networks. Europe's fulfillment of its long

separate volume will cover the similarities in language; Bernal estimates that 40% of Greek words have Egyptian roots.) At the same time, he offers a "sociology of knowledge," tracing the evolution of European attitudes about and portrayals (or mis-portrayals) of these cultural borrowings, from the Medieval period through the present.

### THE RISE OF CAPITALISM AND EUROCENTRIC IDEOLOGY

For progressives seeking to understand white supremacist ideology, the most striking point is that up until the early 1800s, Europeans generally respected Egyptian civilization and acknowledged its formative influence on Greece. Bernal exhaustively confirms for European intellectual history a hypothesis which Black liberation fighters and some socialists (like Lerone Bennett and Ted

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quest for a circuitous route to the East enabled it to appropriate numerous inventions and techniques, and take advantage of and accelerate the decline of other powers. The former Mideastern, Asian and African trading centers were accustomed to multiple trading partners who wanted long-term trade. The conquest of the Americas unleashed a new European approach of plundering trade which startled and completely overwhelmed these already declining older centers.

The first volume of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena, The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, has two main themes. First, Bernal (the son of Marxist scientist J.D. Bernal and a Sinologist by training) encyclopedically summarizes evidence of Greek cultural borrowings from Egypt, primarily during the period between 2100 and 1100 B.C., by comparing artifacts, building remains, mythology, and manuscripts on math and the sciences. (A

Allen) have long postulated for U.S. history: It was only after Europeans enslaved and exploited Africans that the notion of separate races (rather than a continuity of variation in human skin color) emerged—with the inseparable corollary that those races had unequal intellectual and moral capacities. Appearing in England and Germany first, in the late 17th century, these ideas were codified into law over the next one hundred years, though the category of Caucasian, interestingly, did not appear until the 1770s, at the University of Gottingen.

Other 18th and 19th century intellectual trends further precluded acknowledgment of Europe's Afro-Asiatic heritage. The Romantics believed that cultural characteristics of peoples are based on geography, and that a creative civilization must be racially pure. Enlightenment intellectuals expressed particular contempt for earlier versions of history

(such as the Greeks' writings about Egyptian settlements in their land) as mythological and unscientific.

Bernal spends considerable time researching exactly how one version or model of Greek history—the "Ancient Model" of Egyptian influence—was overthrown and replaced, between 1815 and 1830, by the new "Aryan Model" of invading culture-bearers from the North. This point is more important than may be obvious at first glance, for validating a historical materialist view of how knowledge is formed, i.e. for explaining, as we have been known to phrase it, "where do ideas come from?" Bourgeois theorists (at least up until the post-modern, post-structuralist era) have tended to claim that ideas or theories change due to the discovery of new evidence internal to a given field of study, not due to external social factors.

covered of invasions from the north, probably Central Asia, and of an Indo-European language family. This evidence supported the new Aryan model of northern invaders who civilized Greece. Bernal believes there was an invasion from the North between 4000 and 3000 B.C. and then an Egyptian settlement and transformative cultural impact around 1720 B.C., incorporating Greece into a Mediterranean regional system centered in Egypt and the ancient Near East.

In an important methodological clarification, he sensibly states that reconstructions of past events cannot be definitively proven. Rather than proof, we should look for competitive plausibility. For example, the Aryan Model hypothesizes some pre-Hellenic people who don't speak Indo-European, to whom the origins of all aspects of Greek culture are attributed. It also supposes the diseases of Egyptomania and barbarophilia

*Underdeveloped Africa.* Within this framework, Amin has also continued to elaborate a specifically Marxist and Leninist theory of imperialism. Amin takes apart the notions that the so-called "underdeveloped world" is underdeveloped because of internal cultural factors or because of a delay; and that it will "catch up" economically and adopt the democratic forms which the market unfailingly brings.

Amin goes further, denying that the Western model of capitalism can be generalized to the entire planet. He seconds the ecology activists' insight—that if all the world's peoples consumed Euro-North American style commodities at U.S. levels, the result would be incalculable environmental damage, probably irreversible (on a human, if not a geological, time scale).

In looking at how capitalism reproduces itself, Amin's fundamental point is that center-periphery polarization has historically been, and continues to be, essential to and inherent in the system. Through its history, capitalism has produced prosperous regions or nations (allowing an increased standard of living even for the working masses) at the expense of other regions or nations. What's the center and what's the periphery can, in principle, change to some extent, but the polarization is structural. Surplus value is transferred from the peripheries to the center, making a democratic consensus under (white supremacist) bourgeois hegemony possible there. The fact that capitalism originated in Europe and subordinated the rest of the globe also means that a critique of European culture is a necessary aspect of the national liberation struggle and the transition to socialism.

Holding on to these deeper realities can help us at a time when common sense seems to proclaim that markets generate increased living standards for workers and democracy in government, and that planning is synonymous with defective goods and despotism. Amin documents his points thoroughly, showing that even when home markets have developed in the Third World, they were fuelled by the growing luxury consumption of a local elite allied with imperialism, not the consumption of the working masses.

## EUROCENTRISM AND THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

Although Amin's criticism is firmly within the Marxist tradition, that tradition, born in European political and cultural values of the nineteenth century, has had no immunity from the virus of eurocentrism. It is the singular contribution of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain to have initiated a systematic evaluation of *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement*. This publication, due for reprint and at present nearly impossible to find in the United States, deserves far wider circulation. It demonstrates the inevitable presence in Marxism of a deep strain of eurocentrism. Further, it traces, in a materialist fashion, the long and still incomplete process of self-correction which Marxism has undergone—not without regression and political struggle—as the storm center of world revolution moved from Western Europe to Russia, then China and throughout the Third World.

In evaluating the effect on Marx and Engels of working within the Eurocentric framework they shared with the European intelligentsia of their time, the booklet emphasizes that they condemned Europe's brutal crimes against the peoples of the colonial world. But Marx and Engels tended to focus their analysis on what they felt were the positive effects of colonialism; they saw it as breaking up economically and socially stagnant societies and paving the way for industrial development and progress, the preconditions for social emancipation.

The RCLB authors show that this view is flawed on three grounds. First, these societies, while not driven by the competition of capitals to produce cheaper commodities and seize a larger market share, were not stagnant or without increases in labor productivity. It is, in fact, capitalism which produces stagnation in the Third World. Even capitalism's first impact outside Europe often involved the neglect of indigenous public works systems, the substitution of one-crop production for agricultural diversity and the destruction of crafts which could compete with European production, like Indian textiles. Thirdly, non-European societies were not socially stagnant, but rather were

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Bernal demonstrates in detail that, on the contrary, there were no new excavations, word decipherings, discoveries of texts or any other kinds of evidence undermining the Ancient Model during the period when it was discarded. While avoiding mechanical conspiracy theories, he suggests convincingly that it was accumulated social practice which made the Ancient Model no longer believable to Europeans, and created the conditions for the idea of Aryan cultural forebears to flourish. These social practices included the conquest and enslavement of Africans over the previous 200 years and their subsequent re-identification as less than human. Additionally, the reactionary aristocracy of Europe had triumphed, between 1815 and 1830, over some popular gains and democratic values of the French Revolution.

After 1830, with the Ancient Model already shunted aside, new evidence was dis-

which, the Aryanists argue, deluded the Ancient Greeks into believing their ancestors were Egyptian! There is no evidence for either of these entities. On the contrary, Bernal's Revised Ancient Model, which incorporates the early Northern invasion and the Near Eastern influence, adds no new or unknowable factors, and is therefore comparatively more plausible.

## EUROCENTRISM AND THE REPRODUCTION OF CAPITALISM

Samir Amin has continued to develop the pathbreaking insight associated with dependency theory, which, since the 60s, has influenced a generation of Third World economists in and beyond Marxist circles. This thesis was aptly summarized by the assassinated Guyanese revolutionary Walter Rodney in his title of his book, *How Europe*

hotbeds of struggle by the oppressed. Their populations were not merely passive or out-gunned victims of colonialism, but a powerful actual and potential force against it.

In making this argument, *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement* is careful to defend Karl and Fred against anti-communist critics who try and portray them as unrelenting racists, and to show how their thinking also contained important insights into and critiques of colonial oppression. In particular their organizing and writing around the Irish struggle against English occupation laid a theoretical foundation for later rectification. The RCLB authors then summarize how Lenin broke with the most restrictive Eurocentric traditions of the movement to develop theoretical approaches and practical policies which pushed communism toward a more global stance. Though he was sometimes

is useful in demonstrating how the earlier errors of the international movement reproduce themselves in organizations today.)

The conclusions the RCLB draws, like those of Amin, are consciously in the Maoist tradition of upholding national liberation struggles in the Third World as the motor of socialist revolution on a global scale. Standing the economic determinism often espoused by Marxists on its head, they say that capitalism generates the conditions for socialism by creating stagnation in place of an existing dynamism. Thus the only progressive element in colonialism and imperialism is the resistance to which it gives rise. In an insightful formulation, the authors argue that the great capacity for revolutionary action which peasants have demonstrated is due to the fact that they (and particularly women) are ground down in both the traditional system and the newer imperialist system. So peasant

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inconsistent and though survival dictated an early Soviet focus on Europe, Lenin did in fact identify the struggle of oppressed nations against imperialism as the main form in which socialist revolution would develop.

In its treatment of the Comintern period, *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement* highlights the arguments of a number of controversial or neglected figures like M.N. Roy, Sultan Galiev, Li Dazhao and Lamine Senghor. On the other hand, the RCLB authors expose the substantial and damaging hold that Eurocentric thinking retained within the international communist movement. One of their sharpest examples is a biting critique of A. Leontiev's book *Political Economy*, which was the basic text in countless study groups where many U.S. radicals first grappled with Marxist-Leninist theory. (Even the section rehashing the positions of various small organizations within the British Maoist movement

revolutionaries tend to smash what is oppressive in the traditional system and, in the national struggle, to accentuate the communal and constructive aspects of traditional society: mutual aid networks, farming practices that preserve soil, systems of educating the youth and so on.

In terms of program and strategy, Amin and the British authors focus primarily on the countries of the Third World. But what they say is also crucial for our anti-imperialist practice, our vision of socialism and our struggle against domestic white supremacy and eurocentrism. Amin sees the path of emancipation turning away from the false universalism of capitalist eurocentrism through the affirmation of popular national development to the recomposition of a genuine socialist universalism. He believes that real national and popular development can only be founded on a worker-peasant al-

liance delinked from the world system; and that Maoism's contribution was to understand this as the enduring strategic condition for the transition to socialism in the age of imperialism.

By "delinking," Amin does not mean autarchy, sealing off borders or a Khmer Rouge-style program. He means an internally directed development, determined by democratically set priorities for diversified production of use-values to meet domestic needs. In other words, world market prices and financing arrangements should not be the determining factor. Delinking also involves safeguarding and using advantageously a national's particular non-renewable resources and combining indigenous traditional technologies and crafts with a conscious, selective adoption of Western capitalist techniques. It does not idealize either traditional culture and technique or capitalist culture

ment until the 1980s as progressive overall in that worker/manager, city/country and other differentials narrowed. But he has not extensively covered more recent developments. Amin acknowledges that the popular democratic path guarantees the overcoming of neither capitalism nor eurocentrism, but unlike the two alternatives—the capitalist or the Soviet-style statist path—it at least makes such an overcoming possible.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to see eurocentrism as an intricate and pervasive system of ideas and values, and to see that this system has enormous consequences in the real world. Eurocentrism is the belief that Christopher Columbus "discovered" the Western Hemisphere. Eurocentrism is also the fact that the United States, with 5 percent of the planet's

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and technique; it is not fundamentalist in any way. In Amin's apt words:

"Without a truly universalist perspective founded on the critique of economism and enriched by the contributions of all peoples, the sterile confrontation between the eurocentrism of some and the inverted eurocentrism of others will continue, in an atmosphere of destructive fanaticism."

Amin's strategic recommendations are complex, because delinking requires both some (state) barriers against market hegemony—thereby restricting both investment and popular consumption—and genuine worker-peasant democracy. While he does not necessarily idolize Western parliamentarism, he does envision democracy as something other than: "The workers and peasants must want this, because the Party wants it and the Party represents their interests." His writings on China (*The Future of Maoism* and others) assess post-revolutionary develop-

population, continues to consume 25 percent of its natural resources!

Thus, an understanding of and relentless assault on eurocentrism is an essential component of any revolutionary activity worthy of the name. In this spirit we would like to propose four points of orientation to strengthen this component of the struggle.

First, the critique of eurocentrism must be continued as a long-term, ongoing task. The contributions of the authors cited here, all made within the last few years, have by no means completed the task. We who are not scholars or theoreticians cannot discharge this obligation merely by reading these books (or having a general idea of what they're about). At minimum we must grapple with the issues they raise. Is Amin right in dismissing the traditional M-L schema of societal evolution? Is the RCLB too harsh on Marx and Engels and the Comintern?

Does it really make any important difference for us if Abu-Lughod and Bernal are right in their reinterpretation of events which took place centuries and millennia ago?

Second, Marx's point about replacing the weapon of criticism with criticism by weapons has relevance here. For most of us, the greatest contribution to developing the critique of eurocentrism will be made in the course of struggle. This is easiest to see in the instance of the growing opposition to the Columbus Quincentennial, which has a dual character—as a spontaneous movement of the broad left and as a significant offensive in the ongoing ideological battle over what values will predominate in this country. It emphasizes the importance of work in solidarity with struggles in the Third World and in opposition to the crimes of the United States and rival imperialisms there. Eurocentrism will increasingly provide the ideological cover

own framework of self-definition. Similarly, the growth of multiculturalism as an opposition current within education, both in the academy and in elementary and high schools, threatens the hegemony of eurocentrism in these institutions, so crucial in the formation of the world outlook of this country's citizens. At the same time, the vagueness of multiculturalism as a concept leaves it open to cooptation, to the idea that part of the superiority of "Western civilization" is its ability to take in the "best elements" of other societies and make them its own.

Another movement contributing elements to the critique of eurocentrism is ecology activism. Many Greens and others feel a strong affinity for the Native American peoples, which gives them a foot outside the Eurocentric framework. Particularly significant is their opposition to the enormously destructive fetishism of production and con-

trism is such a linchpin of imperialist global domination. The development of a genuine socialist universalism will have other sources and component parts as well—Marxism and the summed up experience of efforts so far to build socialist societies, the critique of patriarchy and the contributions of feminist and womanist theory. There are more, and the

different elements are connected. Indeed, the job of developing a new socialist vision is in no small part the job of understanding the complexity of the oppressive system we live under and the necessary links between the various ideological challenges raised by people's struggle against that system. (C)

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*Eurocentrism*  
by Samir Amin  
(New York, Monthly Review Press, 1989)

*Class and Nation: Historically and  
in the Current Crisis*  
by Samir Amin  
(New York, Monthly Review Press, 1980)

*Delinking*  
by Samir Amin  
(London, Zed Books Limited, 1990)

*Black Athena*  
by Martin Bernal  
(New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1987)

*Before Europe's Hegemony*  
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(New York, Oxford University Press, 1989)

*Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement*  
by the Revolutionary Communist  
League of Britain  
(London, RCLB, 1986. New edition due soon.)

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(C) **Eurocentrism will increasingly provide the ideological cover for racist responses to the growing size and influence of populations of color in the United States, as exemplified by the "English only" movement.** (C)

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for racist responses to the growing size and influence of populations of color in the United States, as exemplified by the "English only" movement. We also have to struggle against progressive-seeming views which are steeped in eurocentrism, like the nativist strain in U.S. populism.

Third, where there is oppression, there is resistance. The critique of eurocentrism develops spontaneously from within many social movements. Afrocentricity is under relentless attack, not because of the one-sidedness of some proponents, but because it is a systematic response to and critique of eurocentrism, produced by the Black liberation struggle. It has the important effects of showing that eurocentrism is not the natural order of things but merely one way—a hideously flawed and inadequate way—of looking at the world. It also shows that the oppressed and excluded can create their

sumption which are part and parcel of the Eurocentric framework and held up by its defenders as proof of the system's superiority. At the same time, this current sometimes goes overboard—into an idealization of precapitalist societies and their supposed harmony with nature. (Actually, some preserved their surroundings, in relative terms, while others destroyed resources and even the habitability of geographical areas; and as for harmony, it is a human value, not a process in nature). We need to avoid the pitfalls of glorifying either capitalist progress and dynamism or precapitalist harmony. The challenge will be to synthesize a viable program for liberation that respects both popular desires and ecological limits.

Fourth, the critique of eurocentrism is an indispensable part of developing and articulating a new socialist vision, exactly because, as we are coming to understand, eurocen-

