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## REVIEWS

*The Long Revolution of the Global South: Toward a New Anti-Imperialist International*, by Samir Amin. Trans. James Membrez. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019. \$89.00; paper, \$25.00. Pp. 480.

In *The Long Revolution of the Global South*, preeminent Marxist economist Samir Amin has posthumously given readers two gifts: his sweeping insights into the global political–economic developments of the last 50 years, and a colorful, sometimes curmudgeonly account of his experiences during those years advising governments and leftist organizations throughout the global South. While it picks up around 1970 where his first memoir *A Life Looking Forward* leaves off, *Long Revolution* departs dramatically from the elegant linear narrative of that volume. This memoir is organized geographically, with nation-by-nation subsections making up regional sections. Each subsection contains Amin’s assessment of the titular nation — its developmental path, the authenticity and strength of its popular movements, and its possibilities for socialism — but is also punctuated by sharp observations and often funny anecdotes about Amin’s experiences in those nations as he advised leaders and gave talks and seminars.

The book’s organizational framework serves a few purposes. First, it allows Amin to foreground his continued allegiance, elaborated throughout his work, to the nation–state as the mechanism through which development, liberation, and eventually socialism has the best chance of occurring. Amin insists on the importance of the nation–state, over and against both the “postnational” imaginaries of the global Northern left (as exemplified by its fetishizing of Europe), and the ethnic, regional, and local organizing principles found in some recent leftist thought.

Second, Amin’s interweaving of national histories, observations, and pronouncements about nations’ possibilities with more personal stories provides a glimpse of a starkly different post-1970s world than the one sketched

by histories of the same period that emphasize the collapse of the Keynesian Bretton Woods order and the subsequent spread of neoliberalism. Amin played a key role in this world, albeit a role he often disavowed even as he consulted with Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso and other decolonizing leaders: “I obviously knew most of the leaders and militants of those movements who wished to discuss with me all sorts of questions concerning the future of their country, Africa, the world system, and socialism,” he writes, “I always gave my opinion freely, knowing full well that history is not made by intellectuals and ideas . . . but results from the confrontation of objective forces” (138). Amin’s many stories of these consultations and struggles reminds readers that in the period when the North retreated from the decolonizing and leftist dreams of the 1960s, many projects of national liberation in the global South had barely begun. The book’s structure thus makes Amin’s global history seem hopeful: by starting from popular movements and national governments in the South, rather than in the power-centers of the North, Amin’s account allows us to glimpse all the battles that remain unfinished.

This is not to say the book is entirely optimistic. Amin acknowledges that the Cold War and many of the national liberation struggles he documents “broke on the side of reaction,” and concedes that currently “this autumn of capitalism does not coincide with a springtime of peoples” (25). At the same time, he attends to the possibilities of even failed struggles. Of Egypt he writes: “An inscription found on walls in Cairo — ‘The revolution has not changed the system, but it has changed the people’ — perfectly captures the transformation of the country, conducive to possible progress in the end” (84). He locates similar “glimmers of hope” in the embers of failed left projects elsewhere that might yet guide resurgent movements. His ongoing confidence in China’s developmental path, despite its commitment to capitalism, also rests on the Chinese people’s experience with revolution, which, he argues, has led them to retain “a sense of equality and social justice as strong as the French,” and “a sense of equal access to the land that cannot be easily called into question” (341). Thus, while he waxes nostalgic for the “river of bicycles filling the streets” of Maoist Beijing, and expresses his love and continued preference for the “Mao jacket” (333), Amin continues to view China with hope and admiration, emphasizing its steadfast resistance to U. S. empire. It is hard not to wonder whether these views would have been challenged by the Hong Kong uprisings, had he lived to see them.

Amin’s faith in the “long memory” of resistance and revolution, much like the core idea of auto-centric development that distinguishes his work, does not extend to formations beyond the nation–state. In the brief Latin America section of the book, Amin praises the movements that brought left and center–left governments to power a decade ago in the Latin American “pink tide.” However, his focus exclusively on the nation–state as a framework

for revolution leads him to discount how many of those movements, as Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui theorize, also drew on a “long memory,” not of national revolution but rather of indigenous resistance to colonialism. This memory, too, furnishes people with a deep sense of equality and justice and a demand for unquestioned access to land and water. The indigenous orientation and epistemology of those movements, as well as those of the Zapatistas in Chiapas and more recent North American indigenous movements such as Idle No More and the encampments at Standing Rock, are important to count among the “glimmers of hope” Amin’s memoir locates. While his brief rejoinder to anti-“progress” environmentalists is cogent — “it is only when humanity has designed a way of prioritizing use values instead of the exchange values associated with the valorization of capital that the conditions for a better management of the relations between humans and nature will come together” (49) — one wishes he had engaged more with the practices of those who currently thwart capitalist development and model a different path. This wish, like that for his thoughts on Hong Kong, makes sense exactly because Amin was such a formidable intellectual; it is hard to believe he will not be around to pronounce on new developments. This book gives readers ample reason to mourn him, and to celebrate the tireless work he did to imagine and bring about a different, better world.

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*Only People Make Their Own History: Writings on Capitalism, Imperialism, and Revolution*, by Samir Amin. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019. \$89.00; paper, \$17.00. Pp. 246.

*Only People Make Their Own History* is a sampling of Samir Amin’s late essays, recently published by Monthly Review Press, that commemorate the life and work of this prolific Marxist scholar and activist. This well-curated collection spans the last 20 years of his writing and serves as an excellent introduction for readers unfamiliar with his contributions, especially since the essays persistently reference his earlier scholarship and reassert its conclusions, generally unchanged.