

SPEECH UPON RECEIVING THE WORLD MARXIAN ECONOMICS AWARD (II)

Theotonio Dos Santos

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I am very honored to receive the World Marxian Economics Award 2013 from the World Association for Political Economy (WAPE). I would like to praise the efforts of a large group of political economists in the world who are in the vanguard of the fight against the dominance of a decadent scientific thought (neoliberal) that takes economic theory back to the 18th century, when the European bourgeoisie tried to prove the possibility of building an economic system based in the “free market,” considered an ideal instrument for the conversion of “rational economic behavior” in the principle of organization of modern society. According to them this society will be the realization of the essence of human nature in the concrete world.

It is very important to we Brazilians who created our Society of Political Economy (SEP) 13 years ago, to receive your 8th Congress and to establish a strong cooperation with you. At the same time we are very happy to collaborate also in the creation of the Latin American Society of Political Economy that will be part of this common adventure in the field of economic thought. All this means that we are developing an offensive that can liberate us from absurd economic policies inspired in ideological principles presented as “scientific” truth.

Latin American thought achieved great prestige during the 1960s and 1970s, when the theory of dependence represented “the greatest challenge faced by official Eurocentric thought,” as affirmed by the Swedish political scientist Bjorn Hetne in his detailed study about this theory. There are many controversies about

the creation of this theory, but without question our contribution was fundamental. According to the Canadian sociologist, Lawrence Aschules, Theotonio Dos Santos “has been one of the first to articulate the theory of dependency. Others have followed him and the theory expanded in such a way that, despite of its youth, we can consider him the grandfather of the theory.”

Anyway, in these years, I became so strongly identified with Latin American social thought that the Russian philosopher Chestopol wrote, “Theotonio Dos Santos, Brazilian sociologist, is the most eminent representative of the Nueva Dependencia school (...). With time, the works of Theotonio Dos Santos became a symbol of Latin American Social Science, not only for colleagues from the continent, but also from other countries in the world.”

Due to the global reach of my work, I was considered by the economics department web site of the Universidad de Malaga to be one of the 250 greatest economists in the history of this science.

My contribution to the social literature of the region has the particular characteristic of having been written in the two regional languages, Spanish and Portuguese, as a result of my long years of exile in Chile and Mexico. For this reason I decided to combine several articles and papers in an organized collection of my works in English in a book under the title of *Fundamental Works: World System, Imperialism and Dependence*. I hope that will permit an overview of my scientific work, which I expect to be a scientific contribution that has a more important role than merely regional and can be summarized in three main points:

1. My academic contribution is considered important for the methodology of inter- and trans-disciplinary activities. Economists, sociologists, political scientists, historians, anthropologists and philosophers have taken it as having also influenced their own disciplines. It was also an important influence to the Liberation Theology and the Liberation Philosophy.

I was also accepted as a substantial contributor to the advance of the methodology because I have introduced the use and methodological control of levels of abstraction as an essential element of dialectical inquiry. My article on the concept of social class that develops this methodology was considered by the U.S. Marxist journal *Science and Society* as “a classic on the subject.”

2. The development of a theory explaining the physical and economic backwardness in Latin America that sought to demonstrate its deep bond with a situation of structural dependence of the same to the world economy. I showed how this dependence historically evolved into increasingly complex forms, from a commercial and financial dependence to industrial dependence, reaching today a scientific and technological dependence. These arrangements led to dependence

on various social formations that were based on different class structures, different classes and dominant and dominated groups.

3. The demonstration that this delay (which takes the form of underdevelopment) and this dependence are linked with the formation and consolidation of an economic, social, political and cultural global hegemonic center that produces different geopolitical designs and shift constantly as a result of the advance in the productive forces of humanity. This part of my work made me one of the instigators and developers of the world system theory, which has today a strong influence on international social thought. I considered this achievement a fundamental evolution of my theoretical work and my research.

I have demonstrated that this world system developed historically in short- and long-term cyclical movements that are linked with various forms of organization of the productive forces and social relations of production. These cyclical movements also allow explanation of the geopolitical hegemony imposed at each stage of evolution of the global system and the difficulties of looping with the growing dynamism of technological change under the impetus of accumulation of the capitalist mode of production. My analysis of the scientific, technical and socio-economic impact raises the question about the need for a global civilization based on social justice, democracy and the sovereignty of peoples and nations.

As I affirmed in this period, dependence is not the “external factor” which it is often believed to be. As I have described in an earlier work on Brazil, a national situation should be approached

by determining its own specific movement. The international situation, in which this movement occurs, is conceived as a general condition but not as a demiurge of the national process, because they are the elements within a nation which determine the effect of international situations upon the national reality. It would be too easy to replace internal dynamics by external dynamics. Were it possible, we would be spared the study of the dialectic of each movement of a global process and could instead substitute for the analysis of different concrete situations a generalized and abstract formula.

A unilateral outlook which only analyses the problem from the point of view of the hegemonic center must be transcended and the peripheral areas must be integrated into the analysis as part of a worldwide system of social and economic relationships. Thus the analysis of dependence and its dynamics can acquire its full theoretical and scientific value, and be considered as a basic instrument to study the international capitalist order and its regional expression. It will permit us

to understand more easily why capitalist world order is an unequal combination of classes and economic private interests.

I also had a role in global “peace studies.” My work was a reference for the renewal of peace research in the 1970s, as documents of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), of which I was a member of the steering committee. I participate also in the creation of regional coordination in Latin America and in Asia, and I was chair of the Brazilian Association of Peace Studies. On this subject, particularly on education for peace and regional and world security, I took part in various activities as a consultant to UNESCO, the United Nations University, the University of Peace and other institutions. As part of this work, I developed the concept of Planetary Civilization as a conceptual basis for proposing a superior civilization and necessary stage toward which the existing civilizations converge, without losing their fundamental identity.

Concerning practical consequences it is important to take into consideration that the question of peace is the most important theme of discussion about the future of the world and it is always considered in political debate. A definition about dependence and globalization is always necessary to the candidates to office—presidents, ministers and public functionaries in general—even when they are not well informed about the theoretical achievements.

My life has also a meaning of rebellion and repudiation of the current socio-economic, political and cultural order. My ongoing intellectual and political-revolutionary activities transformed me into an object of constant political persecution by the fascist regimes that I condemned.

In April 1964, I was on the first list of academics dismissed from the University of Brasilia, following the military coup. I was condemned in many processes in the Brazilian military regime, in the main one being sentenced as a rebel to 15 years’ imprisonment by the Military Court of Juiz de Fora (MG) as an “intellectual mentor of subversive penetration in the country side,” which led me into exile in Chile, after two years of underground activism against the regime, as one of the leaders of the Marxist Revolutionary Organization “Workers Politics” (Organização Revolucionária Marxista Política Operária, POLOP). The POLOP, which was founded in 1961, had a fundamental theoretical and political role for the redefinition of the Brazilian and Latin American left in this historical period. The present president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff began her political militancy in the POLOP, as did several members of her government.

In Chile, as a participant of the Socialist Party of Salvador Allende, founder, advisor and contributor to the weekly Chile Hoy, director of the Center for Socio-Economic Studies of the University of Chile (CESO) and one of the most active organizers of Brazilian resistance abroad, I attracted the hate of the fascist right that put me in the first list of political persecution in the country during the

“coup d’état” of 1973. Unable to participate in the resistance in this country, I was forced into exile in the Embassy of Panama, under the government of General Torrijos and after six months of being prevented from leaving the country I was given “laissez passer” to Mexico with a visa issued by the President Luis Echeverria.

During my exile in Mexico, between 1974 and 1980, I devoted myself to the struggle against military dictatorships in the region mainly through the Latin American Solidarity Committee, the COPPAL (where I represented the movement to restructure the Brazilian Labor Party) and I was active in several movements in favor of Chilean and Brazilian solidarity. I was also an active militant in the International Association of Third World Economists and other movements related to the Non-Aligned Movement. As a result of these activities I work very hard on the understanding of these questions that strongly influenced my academic work.

Back to Brazil, following the vote on the amnesty in 1979, I participated in the formation of the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT). I was one of the writers of its program and manifesto, becoming a member of its national board and head of its executive board in the State of Minas Gerais, where I was a candidate for Governor in 1982. During this period I fought hard in favor of resistance against Chilean dictatorship, of the support of the Sandinistas’ struggle in Nicaragua, Cuba’s international movement for non-payment of external debt, and the defense of human rights at different levels, for the Committee of Defense of the People of Palestine and Lebanon that I head in the State of Minas Gerais, and several other movements, eventually occupying government functions in the State of Rio de Janeiro (director of training of the FESP-RJ, or as Secretary of International Relations to the State of Rio de Janeiro) where PDT and my current party (*Partido Socialista Brasileiro*) have headed the state government since 2002.

But I feel more and more the need to organize a network of researchers around a UNESCO and United Nations University Chair on Global Economics and Sustainable Development that I finally head in Rio de Janeiro with the strong cooperation of researchers and institutions of research and teaching in all continents. The reason for this institutional effort is to try to produce a synthesis of a life of research.

I am currently one of the founders of the movement “Network of networks in defense of humanity,” that has its headquarters in Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba, and brings together the best of the world’s intellectual struggle against the pretended hegemonism of one nation (the United States of America) over the world, which threatens all humanity in the same way as the Nazi fascism did in the 1930s and early 1940s. This is a practical dimension, among others, of an effort to understand the future of humanity that is, I think, the main contribution of the ideas that I developed in a long life of struggle. Thank you for your award. It is an impetus to continue this intellectual and political fight.