Capitализm and democracy

- Capitalism is inseparable from an imperialism that regularizes exploitation between classes and nations.

Achin Vanalk

The missing link in the dominant discourse on democracy and capitalism. Even on the left, current reality apparently demands that we refuse to think beyond capitalism and to not seriously interrogate the substantial but never fully actualized separation of forces between the realms of the economic and the political. Thus infeter-
tarianism to the core we further legit-
imise the view that the liberal and progressive form of democracy, which combined civil liberties with universal suffrage/periphrastic elections, is the only viable model of popular empowerment. On the contrary, what almost needed today, especially since the world recession has raised older and fewer doubts about the nature and value of capi-
talism - is greater recognition of how capitalism both permits and restricts such empowerment.

The changing character of capitalism - the shift from Keynesianism and developmentalism to a globalising neoliberalism - necessarily diminishes both the substantive content of contemporary democracies as well as the very nature of the "democracy vision" that is to be universalised in thought and practice. Now should it be forgotten that capitalism emerged in a world of multiple states and has ever since operated through and in a system of national states? That, for some time past and for a long time to come, the fundamental political unit in which democratic or authoritarian forms of rule will be practiced will remain the national state?

The key issue is whether the most recent phase of globalisation - that of the current US-led globalisation - is really capable of transcending the political force that is the new "globalization". Where possible transitions to democratic governance seem too risky, they will be resis-
ted from the top. Whether internal pro-democracy forces will be encouraged from outside by western democracies depends on how those authoritarian governments fit into the "global order" (currently US-led globalisation). Who in the foreign-policy establishments of the US, Israel or the European Union wants a democratic upheaval in Saudi Arabia? Is it all surprising that all three have denied the legitimacy of a Hamas government set up by elections in the Palestinian occupied ter-
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The trick

The trick here is to try and under-
mine the pursuit of democratic acquire-
ment while claiming to defend and to promote democracy. At the level of the intellectual-theoretical discourse this is done by presenting a restrictive and limited form of representative capitalism as the only sensible ideal to strive for. And in the era of Keynesianism in the US, there becomes an ever more obvious task to be carried out either by a single hegemon - the United States, supported by a network of regional alliances directed against actual or potential competitors - or a collective hegemon trying to resolve the much more difficult problem of successfully institutionalising stable cooperation amongst a wider array of powers. It would have to settle for being merely the "first among equals".

How does this connect to the debate about democracy-promo-
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