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Imperialist Expansion

IMPERIALISM means conquest,—conquest of the world market. It is the accrued policy of the ruling class of Empires, i.e., nations, their colonies and outgrowths—to attract to themselves the wealth of the world. Step by step capitalist development has grown from petty production and local exchange to national production and exchange, to the comity of international commerce.

The day of the small trader and reactionary exclusiveness has gone by, and in their stead reigns the mighty octopus of Imperialism, extending its tentacles in all directions, assembling under one flag all manners and colors of peoples, gathering to itself the overflowing surplus of their exploitation. Where yesterday there was a diversity of little nations, developing in commercial intercourse with each other, with the world's resources inviting yet unexplored, today there are a scant half dozen Empires, controlled by a few groups of powerful overlords, vested in every natural resource, with the world explored, classified and divided, facing each other in deadly rivalry for further development.

Further development would seem to imply Imperialist development—augmented and accelerated. If capitalist society is to continue in existence, only in that development can the world's peoples find the wherewithal of existence. In the face of the vast and intricate mechanism of the greater industry the niggard experiments of liberal philosophy can hardly prove effective to the purpose. And moreover, the burden of executive expense in support of the industrial and commercial system has assumed such proportions that only in increased accumulation can the growing impositions be sustained. The struggling bourgeoisie of the lesser dimension may sigh for the "time of plenty," but the shadow on the dial cannot be put back.

But all such increased accumulation must be at the expense of a rival Imperialist power. The ruling class of one Empire can only enrich itself by appropriating the exploiting power of another. Yet this appropriation involved, on the one hand, not alone an added drain on accumulated wealth, but an actual hindrance to its acquirement, for to that extent it limits the outlet for its surplus production, and on the other hand—and concomitantly—a rapid extension of social destitution, i.e., industrial stagnation.

The nature of capital is such that it cannot move without accumulation; without profit and surplus for more profit. To exist it must despoil. But the process of despoilation takes place through human interest, i.e., the production and exchange of human necessities takes place through the medium of private ownership. Capital, in developing commerce has (which, perhaps is the same thing) developed social necessity and doing so has knitted the nations together. No Empire can produce and supply its own developed necessities; no Empire can live exclusively to itself; their activities are mutually conditioned and on these conditions they unite or conflict.

Imperialism, in the concrete, is thus self interest, the interest of private corporations. Naturally it wants to survive; and will not preservation itself furnish incentives for survival? Will not the consciousness of privilege aid the mechanic of need? Is not the evidence—and desire—for industrial re-organization patent? Is not social extremity apparent? And how can that extremity be alleviated

if not by better industrial organization? And if so, why may not interest and necessity, haltingly, walk together for yet a little longer? Driven into a sullen union under the impulse of capitalist necessity and privilege, social duress and tradition, and proletarian discord and misunderstanding?

It is not Imperialism that requires salvage. Imperialism is but one manifestation of capitalist development, and as in the past, more urgent material conditions will not fail to bring forth other phases of development. The term of Imperialism may have been brief, but mere time extension matters not, and the nearer capitalism approaches climax, the more rapid will be the manifestations of change and the more transient their operation. It is not Imperialism but the principle of exploitation that demands to be saved. And is not the next forward logical step monopoly organization, pure and simple? The cooperative co-ordination of all industry, the elimination of the struggling fry of small capitalists bringing with it the ruin of their pernicious philosophy, and the amalgamation of the world's proletariat on a common basis of class interest and class understanding.

That would mean the organization of capital in co-operative international groups, definite in character, demarcated in interest, thoroughly controlling all industrial and commercial operations, competing amongst themselves for greater power by every means, open and secret, striking at communism and its revolution and combined—as far as possible—on the mutual ground of privilege, against the increasing mass of dispossessed and thrall-like labor. Why not? Saving only revolution, what is to prevent it? Are not world affairs indicative of such an eventuation? Would not such an organization be welcome to Imperialist states now, distraught with baffling difficulties, impotent with discussions (at least sadly handicapped by them), foreign and internal, and saddled with debts and burdens almost beyond toleration?

What is the actual situation? Business is stagnant as a consequence of war economies. The Treaty of Versailles has drawn indemnities upon the Central Powers which the victors dare not accept—and yet cannot afford to reject. The same treaty has carved out new nations and boundaries, which cannot be maintained because they have dissolved the organization of industrial unity. Whole peoples are in distress because political exigencies have cut them off from the means of livelihood—such as it was. And still others are subsidised for the "glorious" purpose of counter revolution. The Treaty of Sevres has set France and Britain at variance on the oil, mandates and slave herding of the East. It has set the Greek against the Turk, the Arab against the Persian, in the hope of saving expansionist Britain from the unwavering kingdom of Bolshevism. The conditions of victory are steadily separating Britain and America, as steadily tending to unite Britain and Japan, involving the East—near, middle and far—in continual warfare, forcing Russia into a new road of development, shattering the sentimental unity of national Imperialism, and replacing it with the unity of interest of particular nationals in world commerce. And through it all, and greater than it all, society, destitute and miserable, clamoring not for the control of its own destiny, but for

a slave's job. How exasperatingly slow is social evolution.

Thus Imperialist expansion puts a brake on present production and builds for the future instead. Society is forced back from all too willing labor till the profits of greater industry shall refuse it—or some of it. Protectionist policies in all countries prohibit interchange of product and—what is worse, perhaps, from our point of view—the peasant everywhere is out for profit, i.e., thinks in terms of small production.

To these impossible conditions is the inevitable reaction. The American Legion, Red Cross societies, Relief organizations, famine leagues and leagues of nations are but so many political devices for the renewal of commerce. They tend (in combination with general economic vicissitudes), to further the projects of financial conferences and trade treaties. They draw particular countries together in terms of mutual interest, foster contracts for big business, veil the labyrinthian ways of diplomacy and delimit the terms for the final clearance of the pettifogging ideology of yesterday.

However, no matter what turn the road takes—international combines, proletarian revolt or chaotic conflict of town and country—it is abundantly evident that the socialist is not yet out of a job.

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MENTAL PROGRESS.

Buckle says mental progress consists of "a twofold progress, moral and intellectual. The first having more immediate relation to our duties, the second to our knowledge." The moral aspect finds its performance in duties recognised, and knowledge of their able performance constitutes the intellectual. All moral codes vary according to time and place, stage of community and state development, with which, of course, must be considered religious codes and their observance. The moral code of the superstitious barbarian compared with that of the present day Christian (considered otherwise than in its relation to the matter of property rights) present a close similarity, while in comparison, the intellectual stride of the latter is great.

By this is meant that while our "moral principles" were known to the ancients, modern intelligence, developed through industrial changes and organized in science, has achievements to record that were unthought of by the ancients. The modern religious man, recognising a moral code which he thinks is based upon and held together by religious belief and observance, at the same time and in company with his fellows, discovers ways and means whereby he may harness the forces of nature to his own use and in so doing he uncovers the cloak of his own superstitious beliefs upon which he has hitherto thought his "good" conduct, measured by his moral code, to be based. Thus the standards of religion are undermined and man's attention is more and more, as time goes on, reveted upon the realities of life. If he is a wage worker his moral code will be bound up in the ethics of his class, and his intellectual advancement will be measured by his recognition of his class interests.

M. M.