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WESTERN CLARION

A Journal of
CURRENT
EVENTS

Official Organ of
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
PHILOSOPHY

No. 846

Twice a Month

VANCOUVER, B. C., JULY 1, 1921

FIVE CENTS

Imperialism

By the most superficial view of history we see running through it a succession of states exercising their supremacy over neighboring peoples. In succession we see the imperial movements of Babylon, of Egypt, of Assyria, the great empire of Alexander of Macedon, the Roman empire lasting in all its ramifications to the ninth century, relics of it persisting in the Holy Roman empire and other struggles for sectional hegemony in Europe; and alongside of this development the great expansive movements in Asia resulting in Chinese, Mohametan and Russian empires; later an attempt at it by France, England and Spain following the great maritime discoveries of the 15th century. The failure of these attempts until the development of capitalist production made possible the struggle on the part of the European powers for colonies, protectorates, etc., in the latter part of the nineteenth century, culminating as it did in the establishment of capitalism in the far ends of the earth, and the beginning of new imperial movements by U. S. and Japan.

Imperialism Exists Only in Class Society.

When the domestication of animals and agriculture first made slavery possible, the basis for imperialism was laid—imperialism as it was in the beginning, is now, and only can be, the extension of the field of robbery, by the robbed for the benefit of the robbers. This defines it in the rough; but the nature of imperialism changes with the manner in which the robbery is perpetrated. In ancient times it consisted only in organized slave-hunting and tribute gathering expeditions. Feudalism, providing the ownership of land as the basis of exploitation converted it into valiant squabbles between the princes over their territory and earth-bound serfs—for kings might come and kings might go, but the serfs stayed there forever. The profitable commerce and piracy in the Indies and Americas led to a temporary rebirth of imperial policy. But the consequent influx of wealth into Europe assisted the perfection of handicraft methods and the acceleration of the ominous industrial revolution, with the result that imperial policies were for the time dropped because the new technique of production and that most thorough of all methods of robbery, the capitalist system, enabled the ruling class to rob far more safely at home than abroad, and moreover, more profitably. Yet this very cessation of imperialism, with its concomitant intensification of exploitation in the European countries, laid the foundation for an imperialism outstripping by far, in its magnitude, in its horrors, in its historic significance, every similar achievement of the past.

The "Ideals" of Imperialism.

Perhaps before starting a scientific examination into modern imperialism it is worth while to clear away some of the idealist rubbish that has been scattered over it. The imperialists of all states have their idealists who convert the material interests they defend into religious, unquestionable ideals, and prate, not of profitable robbery, but of "the manifest destiny of nations." Thus at a recent Lambeth conference of the sky-pilots of Britain, when the question of birth-control was brought up, it was decided that it should not be discussed since it "is the manifest destiny of the British race to people the earth." Similar manifest destinies existing for other peoples make God a poor mathematician. Moreover there are no nations left to own a destiny or any thing else—only states ruling polyglot peoples and hybrid races, but no nations, none of these "ethnological entities" with which the

League of Nations tries to busy itself. Similar claims of the idealists that certain peoples inherit the Viking spirit, of the spirit of democracy, or any spirit whatever that provides a satisfactory shibboleth, may be similarly disposed of, for since none have any claim all have equal claims to them. Occasionally the idealistic have to adapt their metaphysics to electioneering purposes. Imperialism, they say, is a policy adapted to meet the material needs of the great mass of the people. "Come, come," they say, "ye little John Bullets, multiply even as father Abraham and the far ends of the earth, under the good old Union Jackass, shall feed you and your sons and your flocks, and the green earth shall spread her bosom for your nourishment." But it is not so, for the little John Bullets are at the far end of the earth awaiting their turns at the soup kitchen. The idealists have one straw left: They say it all proceeds from humanitarian motives; we must educate, civilize the backward peoples. Neither does this fit the facts. India is no new colony of Britain's, and here is a summary of Imperialism in it. It has brought a people accustomed to agriculture to work 12 and 16 hours in the textile factories for an average wage (in 1915) of 75 cents a week. The infantile death rate in Calcutta in 1915 was 540 per thousand, in 1916, 675 per thousand. In 1911 for 18 millions barely able to read and write there were 294 millions who could neither read nor write. While there were in 1911 in all India only 674 persons engaged in secular education there were 2,769 getting their living by "religious instruction." In Egypt in 1917 only 69 per thousand were literate. Lunacharsky has demonstrated that illiteracy can be eliminated far more readily than that. The humanitarianism of imperialist policy must be a deep, a hidden thing, for it is very far from being evident. Amritsar, the Congo atrocities, the marvellous development of the North American Indians, cannot be explained on the grounds the idealists furnish, so we shall have to proceed to our own materialist analysis.

Exploitation, Profit, Accumulation, Expansion

As materialists we would expect the British empire to result from the way in which the British "pepul" gets its living. In the north the population is divided into Scots who ha'e and Scots who ha'en't; in the south the division is exactly the same. To be precise, 99 per cent. of the population is landless, and 95 per cent. without a penny invested; only 2 per cent. have anything to tax. And yet this people have more kicks than our liquid two per cent. Full fledged capitalism developed in Britain about a generation ahead of the continent. The propertyless there had to work as they do everywhere, and with the marvellous machinery at their disposal produced immense profits. The profits took such form and were of such magnitude that the master class could not consume them, and could only use them to reinvest to produce more profits. After a thorough exploitation of their own country, they had to export their profits, in the form of steel rails, etc., to the backward peoples in exchange for concessions. The export of goods becomes the export of capital—and capital is not so much a thing as it is the condition for the ownership, and use of a thing; so the production of surplus value by the workers of the mother country results in the production of a new set of conditions for the workers of another country. In 1909 of the £12,000,000 of British capital invested in South American railways, 33 per cent. had gone in the shape of rails, etc., manufactured in the U. K.; and again, of the total Brit-

ish capital in the East India Railway in 1857, 2-3rds was actually spent in England, and only 1-3rd in India—for food, wages, etc. All export of capital must either be a reinvestment of interest derived from outside sources or an excess of exports over imports.

"Absentee Investment."

Due to the organization of modern investment it is not necessary for the individual capitalist who wants to rob the workers at the ends of the earth to send a shipment of steel rails or electric motors. Let us watch the actual process. On some peaceful day back in normalcy, 1913 (normalcy means the conditions that beget war) take a look at Lombard Street, London, at the Bourse of Paris and Berlin. There will be investments in every country on the face of the earth, with no real hindrance to, where the capitalist shall invest, yet in those days of normalcy, we could make a fairly safe bet on seeing John Bull buy railway securities in either some part of the British empire or South America, on seeing the Frenchman buy in some foreign government loan, or the German investing in Balkan or Mesopotamia securities. The capitalists' one interest is to get profits; so why this national specialization of investment in an apparent freedom of investment?

It is because this "economic tap-root of imperialism" is essentially political. The export of capital might be called "absentee investment." It is really a feature of modern times. About the earliest recorded instance is when Henry V. of France in 1403 borrowed 1,000 marks from the merchants of Genoa, allowing them to retain the duties on certain goods. This sort of business has increased, until we find in November, 1920, U. S. had owing to her by foreign countries the sum of \$9,450,551,005.61.

Ownership is Based Upon Force.

To bring things to a rock-bottom basis, ownership is based upon force. With the beginnings of foreign commerce, the bogey of the merchant was the pirate—he might by force acquire the merchant's right of ownership. Early absentee investments had to offer high rates of interest to induce the capitalists to risk losing, by force, both principle and interest. In all society the owning class is the ruling class; they rule in order to retain and increase their property. At home they have their police and their soldiers to protect their property rights. When the master class of a nation acquire property rights abroad, the security remains as it always was, force. The British navy was built—not to give slum children pleasure trips—but to protect the £3,500,000,000 British capitalists had invested abroad. It being the function of the state to direct this force, the political nature of absentee investment should be quite clear, and likewise clear the national specialization of investment, and the League of Damns, the alliances, the sphere of influence, the sectional hegemonies and all the rest of the paraphernalia of imperialist states.

The forces of the state work not only to retain, but also to acquire property rights by force. To what extent this is the function of an imperialist state is evident from their budgets. Take the budgets for the peaceful year of 1909:

| | Revenue | Military Expenditure |
|----------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Germany | £324,263,900 | £ 89,249,700 |
| Russia | 252,634,100 | 96,056,000 |
| France | 158,337,000 | 111,095,100 |
| United Kingdom | 181,716,000 | 96,083,000 |

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