

A. Emmanuel

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Dear Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch,

I thank you very much for sending your communication to the Congress of Varna which I have read - I would rather say studied - with the greatest interest. I find your presentation excellent; both for the solidity of your demonstration and - also - for the moral courage you have shown in attacking from such a traditionalist platform as this one the myth of the "fallacious identity imperialism = colonialism". You are right, the colonial phenomenon, from 1880 to the last world war, was only an avatar of the imperialism that existed well before it, and, while being a historical necessity, it nonetheless constituted a contradiction and an obstacle.

The remarks I take the liberty of making hereafter are aimed less at what you said than at what, in my opinion, you omitted to say. They can be placed under two headings: the export of capital on the one hand, and the role of the colonists as a force hostile to imperialism or, if you prefer, as the incarnation of the contradiction to which you yourself refer, on the other hand. On the first point, there is no essential disagreement between us; I only think that you do not go far enough. But as for the second, I believe that ignoring it sometimes leads the etiological chain of your reasoning to a rupture which is poorly concealed by recourse to psychological causes, prestige, exacerbated nationalism etc., or, more seriously, to certain assertions (for example Tschombé as paid hire of the Union Minière) which, while conforming to a generally accepted popular version, nevertheless contradict the historical facts.

EXPORT OF CAPITAL.

Far be it from me to minimize the importance of Lenin's book, but I am forced to note that its limits were not only those of empiricism. On the purely theoretical level, Lenin did something inadmissible: he identified foreign assets with the export of capital, without, at least, explaining why, if indeed he deliberately wanted to introduce a new terminology. Now, it is obvious that a foreign investment can increase by self-financing without needing a new export of capital, and it can even increase in parallel with an import of capital into the host country.

This is exactly what happened with England between 1870 and 1913. Not only was there no export of capital during this period, but there was a net import of capital into England, which is estimated by several economists (including Keynes) at about half the return on investments already existing abroad, the other half accumulating domestically.

If there was any export of capital from England, it was before 1870, and you say that, but even then it does not seem to have been very large.

(Besides, point 3 of Lenin's definition is an economic nonsense. What does the export of capital taking precedence over the export of goods mean? The only materially possible form of export of capital is the export of goods or services. Export of capital is nothing other than a surplus of the consolidated trade balance. If there is one thing that the export of capital can replace it is the importation of goods not the exportation. Indeed, when one has exported a certain quantity of goods one has the choice between two solutions only: to receive the counter-value or not to receive it. In the first case, one has an equivalent importation of goods and one does not speak of it any more; in the second, one has the constitution of an asset abroad, therefore exportation of capital. Apart from that, there is no other exportation of capital materially possible. It would make sense to say that the export of capital goods is taking precedence over that of final consumer goods, but that is another matter.)

If, however, what counts - and this would be what Lenin would have omitted to explain - is not the net exports of capital, but the level of investments reached and commanded by the metropolis, whatever their source (internal or external), then current American imperialism in no way deserves the qualification of super-imperialism, at least on this point, in comparison with the English imperialism of 1913.

British investment abroad in 1913 amounted to ± £4 billion in gold at that time. In real terms, this sum is equivalent to over £50 billion in today's paper money, or over £120 billion in today's dollars. Now, the total of private investment by the United States throughout the world had reached £70 billion by the end of 1969.

So England's investments in 1913 were in absolute terms substantially greater than those of the United States in 1969. But the comparison in absolute terms between an England of 45 million inhabitants at the economic level of 1913 and an America of over 200 million at the level of 1969 is very insignificant. These investments must be related to the national incomes of the investing countries and possibly to those of the invested countries. Then we find that England's total investments in 1913 represented something like one and a half times its annual national income, while the current total investments of the United States represent only less than a tenth of its annual national income. The comparison with the national incomes of the invested countries would lead us to results of the same order of magnitude.

Of course, I understand that the term super-imperialism is not related to the evaluation of investments alone but to the fact that it is an imperialism superimposed on other imperialisms, but why speak with such emphasis about the current investments of the United States abroad when England had done fifteen times better

more than half a century ago? If investments constituted the dimension, if not unique at least essential, of imperialism, and therefore of super-imperialism, the above comparison would lead us to unexpected conclusions concerning its evolution in general during the 20th century. But do they constitute this dimension? That is what I doubt.

COLONIZATION.

I completely agree with you that the colonial phenomenon was rather a "handicap" and an "avatar of the imperialist process", and that in any case it does not fit well historically with the monopolistic stage, which only ends when the first begins to disappear. But by dint of seeing as actors in the colonial phase only the imperialists themselves, that is to say big financial capital, monopolist (at least by vocation) and investor, you attribute this phase to the internal contradictions (and complications) of international imperialism, so that at the limit your presentation leads one to think that some technical error may have been committed.

I do not dispute the validity of your historical analysis. The causes you mention are real and have played their role. But I do not believe that this role was exclusive, and alongside these causes, so to speak immanent to imperialism, and which all translate into a negative factor - lack of resistance of the imperialists to the colonialist current which fundamentally contradicted their interests - I see a positive factor: the colonizers themselves, and I include in this category, not only the colonists properly speaking, but all this world of import-export, including the local agents of the big metropolitan companies, and the colonial officials (at least subordinates), without forgetting the metropolitan correspondents and respondents of these interest groups. For them, the colonial phase was neither an "obstacle", nor a "contradiction", nor a "denaturation"; but their reason for being and their supreme claim.

These elements were the beneficiaries of colonialism and therefore its promoters, without contradiction and without reservation, and as such and according to your own anti-imperialist analysis. They entered from the beginning into conflict with their respective metropolises, therefore with imperialism, objectively at all times, subjectively in times of crisis, going so far as to fight it with weapons in hand (Algeria, Congo, Biafra etc.)

The ignorance of this factor by Marxists is at the root of many misunderstandings and the lack of real dialogue between them and the decolonized peoples. The "protection of the Bantu peoples" was undoubtedly a fallacious pretext of the missionaries and of English imperialism to justify its policy of force against the Boers, but if I were Bantu I would never have forgiven Lenin for having taken the

side of the Boers against England so ardently in 1900, nor, of course, Mao-Tse-Tung for having supported the secession of Biafra in 1969.

In the Congo, where I have personal experience of the events, lived on the ground, I can assure you that Tschombé was in no way the man of the Union Minière, if by this name you mean the Belgian monopoly trust which is behind the Katangese enterprise, that is to say the General Company of Belgium, and not the local agents residing in Elisabethville. Tschombe was the man of the white settlers and the number one enemy of Belgian-American imperialism, which ended up bringing him down, by attacking him physically, a first time in Elisabethville under the flag of the UN troops, a second time by sending anti-Castro Cuban pilots to bomb his mercenaries in Bukavu and finally a third time by sending a CIA agent to kidnap him personally and deliver him to Algiers.

The one who was the man of the big Belgian financial capital, at least at the beginning, was Lumumba, emulator of the Belgian liberal party, that is to say of the party of high finance, released from prison with a reduced sentence (embezzlement) thanks to the intervention of this party, and helped on all levels by this same party to found the MNC. (If the details of the Congolese affair interest you, we can have a conversation on this subject.)

You say that the ease of decolonization was conditioned by the intention to eliminate non-economic constraints. I agree that the colonies were no longer profitable for the metropolises and that political domination had become a burden. But once again you are stopping at a negative factor. Saving the costs of direct administration can explain a certain passive attitude, it is not a sufficient motive to explain the haste with which independence was granted in many cases. A positive motivation was needed for this, and this was the necessity in which the metropolises found themselves at a given moment to outpace their own national-colonists who were threatening everywhere to secede and form White States. This is quite visible in the Belgian Congo where, unexpectedly, coldly, without any pressure, immediate independence was decided, while no one was demanding it, or even imagining it for two or three years, but to varying degrees this constituted a concern which weighed on the scale almost everywhere.

(The French communists were well aware of this danger of secession by the colonists when they participated in the first government after the war and held positions of responsibility in the colonial administration. Suret-Canale, for example, pertinently responded to those who reproached the PCF for not having launched the slogan of independence at the time, by pointing out that in the absence of any indigenous political structure, independence then meant secession and the formation of White States of the type of South Africa or Rhodesia).

If this is so, a crucial question arises: Why does imperialism persist in opposing the secessionist white settlers? Decolonization for decolonization's sake, what difference does it make to it whether it is done for the benefit of the natives or for the benefit of the settlers?

If the essential element of imperialism were the investments of multinational companies, in fact we do not see any difference, except in favor of the secessionist White States. Multinational companies invest enormously more in Canada and already more in Rhodesia than in Tanzania or Uganda. But I do not believe that direct investments and capital movements constitute the essential element of imperialism. The essential element is commercial exchanges. In this respect, the seizure of power in the former colonies by white settlers or by natives makes an enormous difference for the metropolis. An "indigenous" State is by far more commercially exploitable than a White State, and this is independent of the volume of exchanges on both sides. England can sell and buy much more in Canada than it does with Tanzania, but it exploits Tanzania while it is exploited by Canada. Both countries were in the past colonies of England. In one, it was the English who took power, in the other, it was the natives. The result is that today, Canada is much less English than Tanzania. De Gaulle, an eminent representative of big French capital, saw clearly on the subject of Algeria: if the partisans of French Algeria had won, Algeria would have been today much less French than it still is despite the revolution and the war. And it was so that Algeria would remain somewhat French that he fought the OAS, exactly as Salan or Soustelle would have done if they had been in charge of power in France.

I cannot go into more detail in a letter, but I would be very interested in having a conversation with you on these various points.

Very friendly regards