



Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism

Vladimir Lenin

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'Globalisation' is the buzzword of the 1990s. VI Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* was one of the first attempts to account for the increasing importance of the world market in the twentieth century. Originally published in 1916, *Imperialism* explains how colonialism and the First World War were inherent features of the global development of the capitalist economy.

In a new introduction, Norman Lewis and James Malone contrast Lenin's approach with that adopted by contemporary theories of globalisation. They argue that, while much has changed since Lenin wrote, his theoretical framework remains the best method for understanding recent global developments.

Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism Details

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Author : Vladimir Lenin

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Dina says

Why isn't this book present in high school curriculums? It clearly explains what the present system is, and how its going to end up. Self-destruction, wars and depletion of natural resources. And for what so a few parasites can derive imaginary wealth? Indeed - human being claims to have bigger brain yet not that different from a yeast.

Guttermutter says

Gewoon absoluut canoniek - even weinig te versmaden als *Kapitaal*. In de eenentwintigste eeuw vallen oorlog, banken, crises en bedrijven niet te begrijpen zonder dit korte, toegankelijke werk. Lenin zet in *Imperialisme* met behulp van cijfermateriaal in tabellen en gecontrasteerd met de geschriften van burgerlijke economen met rode pels de verregaande industriële monopolisering in de kapitaalkrachtigste westerse landen (+ Rusland/Japan) uiteen, alsook de almacht van de banken, de economische marktpartitie van de wereld, de criteria van imperialisme en analytische miskleunen van eerdere theoretici. Dat laatste is tegenwoordig misschien minder relevant, maar het boek in haar volledigheid blijft onmisbaar.

Daniele Palma says

Il capitale finanziario come espressione dell'avanzata incontrastata e spietata di una capitalismo che con il suo tipico comportamento non risparmia nessuno. Leggere Lenin 100 anni dopo è fondamentale, si apprezza un'analisi obiettiva e scientifica che non si perde in banalità superficiali ma va al seme interrato per scoprire tutta la pianta. L'analisi degli sviluppi del capitalismo all'inizio del secolo ventesimo ci permette di chiarirci le idee in merito a tutto quello che poi è successo nel "secolo breve".

Lenin inoltre in modo estremamente esplicito accusa gli "opportunisti" che spesso sono complici del cammino spietato del capitale.

Shahin Ghaeminejad says

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theokaraman says

This is a very important and topical book. It is also hard to read, especially in the first chapters, due to the lengthy tables and financial data.

All those numbers serve Lenin in order to demonstrate his analysis of capitalism on the eve of the First World War; the Imperialism. Corporations have been united and became large monopolies, owned and financed by big banks and investment funds. Free market is officially dead in large economic scales, and the banking-industrial complex in close cooperation with their respective states, divide the world into spheres of influence for markets, cheap working force and raw materials. In this process the most advanced, "civilized" states engage into competition with each another, making occasional wars (even world wars) inevitable. Imperialist, the monopoly capitalism cannot be fixed, or turned back to a free-market capitalism; it can only get worse.

And what is for today? Corporations and banks back in 1914 were giants; now they are titans. Regional wars killed thousands; now kill hundreds of thousands, even millions. And back then no one anticipated the First World War, though all signs were there...

Manlio Mascareño says

Incredible work about how capitalism made its own contradictions due to free market giving as consequence a new stage of economy: Imperialism. Lenin given us a study about how capitalism turned into a imperialism through a researches that he made of bourgeois data using a critical approaching in marxism. This book was made when World War I began and socialism yet was seeing such as new alternative of see the life. Despite of data which Lenin used and the time the book was written this work contains current elements to understand the fall of capitalism in our times and how capitalism fell in parasitism what is manifested in wars of First World against Third World for its resources and economical routing. Necessary in the study of marxism and economy.

J.P. says

It's easy to see why this is one of his more popular works. Just over 100 pages depending on which version

of the book you get, it clarifies a lot despite its brevity. Lenin makes it clear the next step for capital. Imperialism is made easy because most industries are essentially loose monopolies controlled by a few, who then influence governments across the globe to work in their favor. Different things play different roles to achieve the same end. Banks with their control of loans & interest rates in service to capital do not function as a tool for every day people, if they ever did, but as a business in itself, as a business partner to & facilitator of capitalists & their interests. These interests in a dash for cheap labor & more resources to exploit, divide the world amongst themselves to serve their interests. Competing interests go to war & sell it to the masses under false pretenses. This will always happen because the world is but so big & resources are limited, not all can be in control & he shows how some competing interstate were never really in a position to be at the top despite their efforts. He shows how capital is a parasite on the world & the lives of everyone in it.

Solid book & a must read.

C says

This is the second book I've read by Lenin. This one's short, invective, and theoretically sweet. Could a Marxist ask for more...?

In this book, Lenin is exploring the contradictions inherent in 18th century capitalism, and the resolution capitalism seeks, within its own structures, to resolve the contradiction - or, the negation of the negation – which equals Imperialism. For Lenin, the increased concentration of the means of production, by those who 'win' on the 'free market' (even if winning means cheating and free market is a misnomer) will rise to a monopoly position. Lenin of course seems spot on about this observation, and this view is now generally accepted, hence trust busting, heavy state regulation, the requirement for too big to fail intervention, etc. Monopoly is a stage of capitalism, we've come to accept it, and Lenin chose to fight against it.

Lenin believes, again rightfully so, that members of an industrial and productive monopoly will begin to sit on the board of directors, intermingle with, and holds strong ties, with monopoly banks, or those that garner profit via 'Finance Capital.' Again, this is no surprise today. If you analyze who sits on the board of most of Wall Street's banks, along with GE, Lockheed Martin, Shell, etc, you'll find the same names cropping up. Thus, there is no real democracy in this 'free market,' there is influence and oligarchy. A financial oligarchy to be precise.

This oligarch will then be sure to guarantee that finance capital works in its interest, and prevents up-and-comers, from usurping their position, or even damaging their position, as the newest Monopoly Man. Moreover, whereas the Capitalism of Marx's period was obsessed with exporting commodities, once all colonies are fully colonized, and the territory is fully seized by the state, finance capital enters through the back door – hell maybe even the front, sometimes armed (i.e., with the state police, or US military on its side) – to cease exporting commodities, and begin to export capital. Capital will serve as the catalyst for production in the colony, where the colony will begin to do the exporting of raw materials, as backed by finance capital from a hegemon (albeit Lenin doesn't use this term), and ship the resources back to the hegemon, while paying interest on the finance capital lent to it. Thus, Imperialism is what follows successful colonization. Again, check out what the US was doing in Latin America after WWII, and the Middle East now, and it's hard to deny Lenin's claims.

There is a new development though in Capitalism, a negation of imperialism if you will. Now the oligarch

doesn't just shift from board to board acting in its own interest, but it shifts from board, to board, to regulation agency, to seat in congress, to cabinet position in the White House, etc, using all these various outlets to act in the interest of monopoly capital. This is now known as the "revolving door" phenomena in Washington. Henry Paulson goes from Goldman Sachs, to Secretary of Treasury, to a private closed door meeting with Wall Street's oligarchy, constantly acting in the interest of finance capital, to name one example. Of course I doubt any of this would surprise Lenin, and it shouldn't surprise anyone else either, only offend them.

Fug o' Slavia says

If you think Ultraimperialism exists, i feel bad for you son, Capitalism's got stages and imperialism's the highest one

Yogy TheBear says

First I need to rant a little:

Dear Lenin, I am against the state; I am against imperialism, militarism, colonialism, statism; I am against interventionism discrimination(positive and negative) of economic agents by the state that breeds long standing cartels and monopolies; I am for a free market, for liberty and for private property. My position can be described and falls into the category of libertarianism, a position you never thought about and you may consider absurd. But my position, although I do not hold the pretension of absolute truth or of covering all possible nuances of human activity and morality; my position is way more consistent and moral then yours !!

This book has big propaganda and rhetorical value but it is a abuse and total lack of economic knowledge. Firstly Lenin dose not bother to make a distinction between real capitalism and crony capitalism. His definition and usage of the term "capital" unveils his illiteracy in economics; Thus he throws statistics after statistics in witch he dose not take into consideration inflation and the money supply over the years. Capital for him in marxist tradition is just a monetary abstraction that just regenerates and generates new capital... noting more to it.

His rhetoric on monopoly is a smart one. But I fail to understand what is his definition of monopoly... The possible phenomenon that may occur under capitalism are exaggerated and misunderstood to serve his purpose, the advance of his theory on the inevitable progress of free market capitalism to imperialism... Yet he dose not consider the help the state has gave to those firms... That is crony !! And if monopoly is bad for him... Dose he realize that a socialist super state monopoly is the worst possible ?? Yes monopoly and cartels form under capitalism. But they also dissolve under true capitalism. The concentration of capital also leads to the flooding with consumer goods for the population, witch Lenin skilfully ignores !! Yes as competition diminishes the flooding of the masses with consumer goods is more reduced but even a monopoly in shoes wants to sell shoes to all people and wants all people to be able to buy shoes. The argument of the hiding and stockpiling of consumer goods for speculation is again silly. Yes the phenomenon of speculation is real but a firm can not speculate by stockpiling in the event of a future major shortage and in the same time produce at the same level and pay wages !! It is an impossibility and another example of the exaggerations marxist employ to demonize capitalism. Speculation on the scale, for the scope and in such a class conspiracy manner as marxist dreams never happens.

His chapter on the banks is pure stupidity. You can not speak of banking without mentioning fractional reserve banking ! His figures of the asset of banks is irrelevant when you clearly do not know about monetary expansion by private and central banks !

The chapters on imperialism, statism and militarism may be worth but it is poisoned with his attempt to put those ill tendencies of states as attributes of capitalism. Everything wrong is because capitalism... What a stupid and dangerous simplification of evil... What about the evil within you Lenin ?

Erik says

I like the book, but it reminds me of a story. I used to teach talented students at Hunter college and one of them, a Russian girl, wrote a book report on this for her political science class. She sought to show how pro-American she was by criticizing all of Lenin's assumptions, and did a respectable job. Little did she know that her Marxist professors at Hunter would be horrified by her analysis. Her professor wrote in the margins to her paper: *Can't you see Lenin was right!??!*

Paul says

Inside the thicket of familiar Communist polemic are some thought-provoking and still-relevant insights.

In the 1990s I used to read *The Globe and Mail*, and one of my favorite contributors was Donald Coxe, who had a column in the business section. Coxe is an investment analyst and he manages one or more mutual funds of his own. Recently I was reading an interview with him on BullionVault.com, a British website devoted to buying and selling gold, and in the course of it he mentioned this book by Lenin, praising it as a brilliant analysis of how the business machinations of the European powers led to World War I. Intrigued by this recommendation from a capitalist I respected, I took the plunge and bought my own copy of Lenin's *Imperialism*.

Now I've read it, and while I think that Mr. Coxe overstated the quality of this book, I did find some valuable ideas in it.

First the negatives: this is a Communist tract that is mainly preaching to the converted. It is filled with the typical rhetorical clutter of name-calling, sarcasm, and ad hominem jabs, all of which severely impair the seeming objectivity and credibility of the author. He spends much time excoriating other Marxist authors for their perversion of Marx's doctrines. And it doesn't help that Lenin himself went on to become a dictator and a tyrant.

Allowing for all of that, I found the book to be of definite interest. For one thing, Lenin is comfortable with facts and figures, and he presents a number of short tables showing the growth of industrial and then banking monopolies and cartels in 19th-century Europe and America. He observes how the frenzy of colonial land-grabs of the late-19th century followed hard on these developments, and he infers a causal connection: The original capitalism of free trade, which had made England so rich, had evolved to a later stage of monopolistic capitalism, in which competition has given way to coercion. He gives plenty of persuasive evidence of the predatory and anticompetitive behavior of the cartels in steel, railroads, oil, and electricity, to name a few. The tycoons at the top divided the world into fixed territories and set the prices. If competitors

appeared, they were bought out or crushed.

Profits are bigger if you control the cost of raw materials yourself; this is achieved by capturing the territory where they're produced. This is where a national element enters, for the cartels of different countries don't necessarily play nicely with each other; their agreements can collapse. The cartels of each country drive their country's colonial agenda. Lenin shows how Earth was completely parceled into colonies in the second half of the 19th century. And since World War I led to a big realignment of these, one has to wonder what role colonial competition played in that ferocious conflict.

In the last century, most colonies have achieved nominal independence. But war remains a big business. Why exactly is it that one country--one possessing vast resource wealth--is invaded to seize its nonexistent "weapons of mass destruction", while another country--one possessing no resource wealth--is left alone, despite actually possessing such weapons? I'm speaking of Iraq and North Korea, but other examples come to mind.

War is justified to credulous voters in terms of ideology, "security", or even emotional slights; but its real business appears to be what it has always been: the seizure of assets by force.

V. I. Lenin saw this 100 years ago. He thought that Marxism was the cure. Apparently it isn't. So the disease rages on.

The ancient dictum still applies: *cui bono?*--"who benefits?" Or, in the words of the Watergate source Deep Throat: "follow the money." Lenin followed the money, but neither he nor anyone else has been able to do much about it.

W says

Hauntingly accurate in its predictions of finance capital. Eerily prescient of the 2008 bank bailouts and America's overseas adventurism during the last 110+ years. Lenin does a fine job of highlighting the inherent flaws and contradictions of capitalism, and how monopolies and imperialism hurt us all, especially the peoples of abused territories. Many references to economists and historians I am unfortunately unfamiliar with, yet many cited facts and insightful accessible data via charts and graphs.

Arab Millennial says

(For more reviews like this, please visit arabmillennial.net)

6/10

I have never read a book full of so many enigmas. It is interesting, for example, that Lenin should come from an elite family and aspire to expose capitalism and the bourgeoisie. At the same time, doing so propelled him into further international attention and advanced Lenin's power as leader of the USSR. So perhaps this book is not as selfless as it appears to most Leninists.

Leninism vs Marxism

One of the stand out features of Imperialism is the path through which Lenin takes the Marxist vision. Whereas Karl Marx discussed the psychological consequences of capitalism within nations – such as alienation between classes and a growing class divide – Lenin takes the Marxist critique of capitalism to the international level – almost a “Neo-Marxism”, if you will.

Some people may argue that this is quite logical, as nations are formed of individuals, and so division between rich and poor individuals should logically lead to division between rich and poor nations. Others may claim that rich nations can contain poor inhabitants, and so Leninism isn't as coherent as it seems and is an incomplete conclusion of the Marxist vision. Lenin nonetheless continues that capitalism concludes itself at imperialism; as countries grow wealthier they must search for more resources and commodities for their advanced economies, and hence must colonise other poorer nations.

Lenin uses many examples to support this main point, correlating economic growth with colonial expansions within the German, British and French empires of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Immediate problems with Leninism

It is incredibly impressive (if I may say so) that Lenin could source so many figures and statistics in a pre-internet world where gathering information would have required him to visit and dig through national libraries and archives. It was not typical of political theorists of his time to reference statistics and data when making philosophical arguments, probably for this very reason. Despite this, three concerns immediately jumped out to me while reviewing Lenin's data:

1. I believe that the relationship between capitalism and imperialism is not simply one in which capitalism results in imperialism; rather, a cycle can develop in which imperialism can, in return, exacerbate capitalist growth – for example, in the British acquisition of India, and how this developed the British tea trade during the Empire. In other words, I believe that there can be a “discursive” relationship between capitalism and imperialism, whereas Lenin implies in his book that this relationship is a causal, linear relationship – simply, A causes B. If anything, my critique of Lenin is more in line with Marxist philosophy – if imperialism in turn strengthens colonisers and leaves those colonised poorer, this results in a bigger “class divide”, if you will, between rich and poor nations. Rich, colonising country A & poor, colonised country B can be in continuous interaction with one another.
2. Another problem I noticed was Lenin's very evident “confirmation bias”. He appeared to be deliberately selecting data in order to advance his presupposition that capitalism is unique insofar as it results in imperialism. Given that it must have been relatively difficult for Lenin to find data for his book, I think readers should forgive him for his inconsistency as he flicks, for example, between Deutschmarks and Dollars in his economic tables. Nonetheless, when Lenin shows that imperialist nations have grown economically, he does not discuss whether or not this is real growth that takes into account inflation, or whether this is nominal growth which is not so drastic upon closer inspection. Equally, Lenin does not discuss the prospect of Marxist countries also imperialising to advance Marxist ideals somewhere along the future.
3. This leads me to my third and final main criticism: Lenin takes issue with Western imperialism in his book, but later ends up instructing Russian troops to invade the Caucasus as leader of the USSR. In Lenin's

mind, this may be because the Caucasus is part of “historical Russia”, but this is a highly subjective and controversial claim. One of the symptoms of colonisers is the patronising narrative that places colonised countries as dependents of or so-called “peripheries” to the economic contexts of imperialist nations. Leninist Russia did just this in its occupation of the Caucasus – it viewed the region as a peripheral part of Russian history, with the Russian nation at the centre of its own historical focus. Lenin’s actions as leader of the USSR therefore discredit his conviction in writing Imperialism, opening his motives and coherence to many questions.

How does Lenin contribute to colonial theory?

Many postcolonial theorists today, such as Edward Said and Ashis Nandy, make a distinction between coloniser and colonised – Lenin, however, recognises layers within the colonised. He discusses the issue of so-called “semi-colonies” – nations that are not formally colonised by another, but are highly economically dependent on another nation. This is a very interesting distinction, one that I had not considered until reading Imperialism, though it is unclear who was first to introduce the term “semi-colony”, and to what extent this concept had been discussed – if it had been discussed – before Lenin’s book.

The only thing that I would probably add to the concept is the idea of cultural dependency – for Lenin, everything comes down to economics: a nation is either growing extremely fast economically, or it is being used for its economic resources, and it is the nature of this economic relationship which defines who is coloniser and who is colonised. I find this very reductive – I think we should also be considering the psyche – how do these countries perceive each other – do they look up to each other? After all, most countries are economically interdependent today, and by Lenin’s logic China and US are “semi-colonies” of one-another – but this seems ridiculous when put in such crude terms. There must be more to colonialism than the economic relationship; if Lenin can make a distinction within colonies, it surprises me that he did not provide more nuance and depth on the nature of colonialism and look beyond the economic characteristics of imperialism.

I do recognise that I have the benefit of years of literature on colonialism that followed Lenin’s death. Therefore, it is easier for me, as a reader, to criticise Lenin’s book than it had been for Lenin to write his book in 1917. From this perspective, I think it is fair to say that this book is a valuable start on colonial theory, but it definitely needs supplementary reading.

By Osama Filali Naji, Edited by Yassine Charrar

tom bomp says

An excellent discussion of imperialism and capitalism. It's short so it only provides a sketch but it highlights many points which are essential to grasp for leftists today and are often ignored (the inevitability of imperialism, uneven development, labour aristocracy etc). I'm rating it 5 because, even though it's not as developed as you might hope for various reasons and it could obviously be better, it is clear about the important details of capitalist development - it's perceptive, clear and easy to read and doesn't outstay its welcome. I recommend it to people thinking about capitalism now - in my opinion the ideas it talks about are absolutely essential.

One criticism is that he's not as unequivocal about the misery inflicted by exploitation of dependent countries. Maybe a little superficial but still.
