

IMPERIALISM: ROAD TO SUICIDE THE POLITICAL ORIGINS AND USE OF RACISM

Imperialism, which first entered the scene toward the end of the last century, has today become the dominant political phenomenon. A war fought on an apocalyptic scale has revealed the suicidal tendencies inherent in every consistently imperialist policy. Yet imperialism's three main drives—power for power's sake, expansion for the sake of expansion, and racism—continue to rule the globe. No longer does politics seem to be treated as the art of living together: it is fast developing into a rather highly complicated technique of mutual destruction.

The historian, investigating the visible motivation of that fateful “scramble for Africa” which in the eighteen-eighties set in motion the present imperialistic era, is tempted to remark that here a molehill labored and brought forth a mountain. Harmless indeed appear the activities of the small number of capitalists whose wealth and productive capacity overflowed the economic and social systems of their countries and who, therefore, cast their predatory eyes over the globe in search of new investments for superfluous capital.

The fantastic disparity between apparent cause and effect makes the inhuman aspects of our time even more inhuman, because more incomprehensible. That the comedy of the Dreyfus Affair should have culminated in factories for the extermination of whole peoples violates our sense of human dignity; that a world war was needed to get rid of Hitler is shameful, precisely because it is also comic. From this fact arises the valiant attempts of contemporary historians to lend events a certain grandeur, a dignity they do not possess, in order to make them humanly more tolerable. In a new form of hero-worship, the worship of the greatness of events in themselves, they have created an atmosphere of highly educated confusion, in which the crimes of modern imperialism are excused with learned parallels from the times of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire down through the Napoleonic wars.

Nor does so-called “liberal” thinking offer much greater illumination than the confusing parallels of conservative scholars. The liberals still hold fast to the “economic factor” and its necessary progressiveness—with little awareness, seemingly, that these are the very slogans which the imperialist themselves invoke whenever they scrap one of the Ten Commandments. It is true, liberals can go to Marx for consolation, who for his part went to Goethe—“*Sollte diese Qual uns quaelen / Da sie unsere Lust vermehrt? / Hat*

nicht Myriaden Seelen / Timurs Herrschaft aufgezehrt?” (Should this anguish anguish us, / since it increases our pleasure? / Did not Timur's dominion / consume myriads of souls?) However Marx could offer as excuse the fact that though he knew empires—conquering and conquered peoples—he did not know imperialism—superior and inferior races.

Our intellectual bankruptcy in the face of the monstrosities of our time is at least partly due to the fact that the imperialists of the last century hardly knew themselves what a frightful machine of destruction they were setting in motion when they preached profit and more profit to the much-too-rich and opened prospects of luck and more luck for the much-too-poor.

The Unholy Alliance

When the diamond and gold fields of South Africa were discovered in the seventies and eighties the new desire for profit-at-any-price merged for the first time with the old fortune-hunt. Prospectors, adventurers and the scum of the big cities emigrated along with capital from industrially developed countries to the Dark Continent. And from then on the mob—begotten of the monstrous nineteenth-century accumulation of capital—always accompanied its begetter on these latter-day voyages of discovery, in which nothing was discovered but opportunities for investment. In many countries, particularly Britain, this new alliance of much-too-rich and much-too-poor was confined to overseas possessions. In other countries, particularly those that, like France and Germany, had come off worse in the partition of the globe—or, like Austria, had obtained nothing at all—the alliance took shape at home in a so-called colonial policy.

The Paris of the anti-Dreyfusards, the Berlin of the Stoecker and Ahlwardt movement, the Vienna of Schoenerer and Lueger, the Alldeutschen in Prussia, the Pan-Germanists in Austria, the Pan-Slavists in Russia—all were alike in seeking to realize in immediate domestic terms the new political possibilities of this alliance between capital and mob. The Pan-movements in Eastern and Central Europe, with their insistence on the absolute primacy of foreign policy over all domestic issues, and their concept of a “holy” racial unity of the nation, prepared the way for the “imperialization” of their respective peoples, for a race-organization that could be used to loot foreign territories and to exterminate foreign peoples.

Indeed, the alliance between capital and mob could only be effected through the concept of race and race-unity. The two great forces that seemed in the beginning to thwart the ambitions of this alliance and the full develop-

ment of an imperialist policy—the tradition of the national state, and the labor movement—proved helpless in the end. Nationally minded statesmen felt an instinctive suspicion of colonial politics. Robespierre, however, had been the only one to express this with political consciousness: “*Périssent les colonies—Si elles nous en coûtent l’honneur, la liberté.*” (“Let the colonies perish, if they are going to cost us honor and liberty.”) In 1871 Bismarck rejected the offer of the French possessions in Africa in exchange for Alsace-Lorraine, and twenty years later he acquired Heligoland from Britain in return for Uganda, Zanzibar and Witu. In the eighties Clemenceau denounced the “ruling party of the well-to-do” in France for demanding that an expeditionary force be sent to Egypt against the British—they thought only of protecting their investments, he stated, and for the sake of them were willing to involve the Republic in overseas adventures. Thirty years later he still light-heartedly surrendered the Mosul oil fields to England to seal a British-French alliance. But such prudent limitation of national policy seems backward provincialism in the light of our new global problems—which imperialism at least pretends to be able to solve.

Despite all their “Internationals,” the preoccupation of the European working-class movements with domestic politics so narrowed their vision that they chronically underestimated the imperialist parties. Occasional warnings against the *Lumpenproletariat* and of the possible bribing of sections of the working class with crumbs from the imperialist table led to no deeper understanding of the new political forces on the part of socialists; for, according to Marxism, an alliance between the mob and capital would be unnatural—it would violate the doctrine of the class-struggle. Although such socialist theorists as Hobson, Hilferding and Lenin were the first to lay bare the purely economic motives of imperialism, their penetrating analyses (except in the case of Rosa Luxemburg) served to conceal, rather than uncover, the political pattern of imperialism—its attempt to divide mankind into master and slave races, into higher and lower breeds, into colored people and white men, into *citoyens* and a *force noire* that was to protect them, its attempt to organize nations on the pattern of savage tribes, and at the same time to equip them with the technical accomplishments of a scientific civilization.

The Profit Motive Submerged

Today we see that the main threat is the political structure of the imperialist machine, the chief problem how to destroy ideologies that induce peoples to

help and serve them. Imperialist politics long ago veered from the path of obedience to economic laws, which are discarded once the “imperial factor” takes the center of the stage. Only a few elderly gentlemen in high finance still believe in the inalienable rights of profit; and the mob, believing only in race, tolerates them for the sake of their financial support, which is granted—even when all hope of profit has vanished—to protect at least the remains of former riches. For in the alliance between modern capital and the mob, the initiative has passed to the latter, whose race-worship and cynicism as to moral values have triumphed over the nineteenth-century faith in infinite profits.

The recognition of the mob and its power in politics has resulted in the discarding of all hypocrisy—which after all was at least a compliment to virtue. Domestic and colonial policy can no longer be kept strictly separate. No longer is it possible to avoid the boomerang effects of “empire building” on the home population, and on the foundation and structure of the national state. The British imperial system is becoming obsolete. Organization by race, which is the true heart of Nazism, is inevitable if imperialist policy is to be supported by masses and not only by capitalist interests.

The mob, on the other hand, growing in numbers in all “civilized” countries and already complete with its own intellectual elite, but without any social or other base or structure of its own, can be re-organized and set in motion only as a race—as white men (or black or yellow or brown). He who was formerly an Englishman can end by becoming a “white man,” now that so many Germans have become “Aryans.” The failure of the German venture in no way guarantees that other peoples and nations will not disappear into races.

England was made well acquainted with this danger to her democratic constitution by “white men” returning home from colonial service, and even her imperialistic theorists and historians warned her against it. The weakening of the old colonial empires and the fact that racial doctrines are beginning to poison the insurgent colored peoples, too, may encourage the adoption of forms of government that will attempt to overcome opposition at home by making domestic and foreign policy identical—and which by doing so can attain a degree of frictionless efficiency in administration, both at home and abroad, hitherto unknown.

The Rise of the Mob

The rise of the mob out of the capitalist organization of society and of production was early observed, and its growth carefully and anxiously noted,

by all great historians of the nineteenth century. Historical pessimism, from Burckhardt to Spengler, springs essentially from this phenomenon. But what the historians, sadly preoccupied with the pure phenomenon, failed to see was that the mob was not to be identified with the growing industrial working class, and certainly not with the people as a whole—that it was composed from the very start of the *refuse of all* classes.

It was this that made it appear as though the mob had abolished class differences and as though—standing outside the class-divided nation—it was the people itself (the “community of the people” in the Nazi sense) instead of its distortion and caricature. The historical pessimists understood the essential irresponsibility of this new social stratum; and they also correctly foresaw, taught by historical precedents, the possibility of the conversion of democracy into a despotism whose tyrants would rise from the mob and lean on it for support.

What they failed to understand was that the mob is not only the refuse but also the by-product of society, directly produced by it, and therefore never quite separable from it. They failed, accordingly, to notice high society’s constantly growing admiration for the underworld—this runs like a red thread all through the nineteenth century—and its continual, step-by-step retreat in all questions of morality. At the turn of the century the Dreyfus Affair showed the underworld and high society in France to be so closely bound together that it was difficult to place any of the “heroes” of the Affair definitely in either category.

This feeling of kinship, joining together begetter and offspring—already classically expressed in Balzac’s novels—antedates all practical economic, political or social considerations; and in our time it finally induced the German bourgeoisie to cast off their traditional political morality, confess their relationship to the mob, and openly call upon it to champion their property interests.

This SOS was more than an emergency measure and had deeper causes than the temptations and opportunities of the moment. What could have been already discerned during the Dreyfus Affair has become quite apparent today, namely, that the bourgeoisie and the mob are only two sides of the same society, whose members have essentially identical convictions on all the more important precepts of everyday life.

It is just this fact, that it is built on the solid ground of a common philosophy, that makes this alliance so extremely dangerous.

This philosophy, in turn, is difficult to deal with because none of the great, recognized philosophers of Western culture ever cared to own himself the philosopher of the bourgeoisie. None—with the one and great exception of

Hobbes, whose works, written three hundred years ago, the bourgeoisie never cared to openly invoke. This was partly because of indifference or lack of need—everything went so very well that any proclamation of principles was hardly necessary—and partly because of a genuine lack of courage.

This blessed lack of courage—known in our literature as “bourgeois hypocrisy”—we owe to the force of Christian and Western tradition. The main difference between the mob and the bourgeoisie is that the former has no such inhibitions, but avowed from the start the nihilistic attitudes which had run subterraneously through the last centuries. Hobbes’ outstanding quality is his utter lack of inhibitions, his utter freedom from “prejudices,” and his almost naive devotion to the true aims of the new bourgeois class.

And now that the nihilism of the mob has stripped the bourgeoisie naked of all its more attractive qualities, we would do well to glance back at the only first-rank philosopher who ever stated the hidden principles implicit in bourgeois attitudes.

The Bourgeois Philosophy

These principles, as set down by Hobbes, can be summarized in the following axioms:

1. The value of a man is not his virtue, but his price. The price, fixed by the buyer and not the seller, depends upon the “esteem of others,” who in joining together form society. All values, consequently, have their origin in society, are defined by the esteem of the majority.

2. Against this majority of the “others” stands the individual in an absolute helpless minority of one. In his complete loneliness, he determines what is to his own advantage. Since only power can help him to pursue what is to his advantage, against the majority of the “others,” the desire for power is the fundamental passion of the isolated individual.

3. In their concern with the happiness of their own private lives and the consequent desire for power, all men are equal. This psychological equality in turn is based on the natural equality of men, which consists in the fact that each man can kill his fellow-man. While their psychological equality makes all men potential competitors, their natural equality as potential murderers places them all in the same state of fundamental insecurity. From both competition and insecurity arises the need for the state.

4. The state acquires the monopoly of power. It vouchsafes in exchange a conditional guarantee against being killed and sets the limits of competition. Security is provided by the law, which is a direct emanation of the

power-monopoly of the state, and has no connection with any standards of right or wrong. In the eyes of the individuals who live under it, it represents absolute necessity. It requires unquestioning obedience, the blind conformism of bourgeois society.

5. Once public affairs are regulated by the state under the guise of necessity, life again becomes competition. Its main value is success, since the completely unsuccessful are automatically barred from competition. However, in a society of individuals—by nature all equal in power as well as in desire for power, and equally protected from one another by the state—only *chance* can decide success. The difference between pauper and criminal disappears—since both stand outside society.

6. Those excluded from society—the unsuccessful, the unfortunate, the shameful—are freed of every obligation towards society and the state, once the latter fails to take care of them. They are returned to a state of nature and to their elemental ability (and right) to kill, thus restoring that fundamental equality which society has submerged only for the sake of individual security. The mob and its organization into a band of murderers is clearly foreseen as one of the consequences of the Leviathan state; the intimate relationship of the mob with society itself and its standards could not be more clearly indicated.

7. Since power represents essentially only a means to an end, and not an end in itself, a community based solely on power must decay in the calm produced by order and stability—its very security must in the end expose the state as built on sand. To retain its power, it must strive for more power; a vacillating structure, it must always find new props from outside because its own power-reservoir, the individuals living within the frontiers of its authority, is limited. This necessity of accumulating power is embodied politically in the theory of the international “state of nature,” in which the individual states exist in relation to each other in a “condition of perpetual war,” by which the state can increase its power at the expense of other states.

8. The same insight into the necessary instability of a community founded on power is philosophically expressed in the concept of the endless process of history. Corresponding to the constant necessity of increasing the power of the state, this process must take the form of progress—a progress that inexorably catches up individuals, peoples, and finally all humanity, regardless of human welfare. Politically speaking, the power accumulation of a single state can logically end only in an absolute power-monopoly all over the earth—that “world state” whose popularity with some liberals at the moment we need not underline.

The Twilight of Progress

This is the philosophical foundation of imperialism which by an inevitable logic reveals itself in its final stages as the strategy of suicide. The mob, the chief executor which fulfills the ideals and objectives of this society outside and against itself, is foreseen in Hobbes’ colossal structure. Revealed also is the role of progress as an illimitable *process* which no individual human effort can halt, precisely because the individual human has deeded over his own power to the power-accumulating state for the sake of security and survival. In exchange, the individual is invited to enter the vehicle of progress and to become a part of a blind power-machine which sets no limit to his accumulation of capital, no bounds to his career as a self-made man.

This concept of progress through eternally expanding power is not to be confounded with the eighteenth-century idea of progress. For eighteenth-century man, progress was to culminate in the emancipation of man. It implied the liberty and autonomy of the individual, who was to be freed from all apparent compulsions so that he might govern himself according to a moral law inherent in each human being.

Quite different is the nineteenth-century bourgeois concept of progress, with its accent on submission to power, which swallowed up and dissolved into itself the earlier idea. Its optimism of endless expansion typified the whole century, and survived even the first stages of imperialism down to World War I. But just as significant—perhaps even more fundamental—is the deep melancholy of the nineteenth century, the sadness that again and again crops out and darkens the period, and to which nearly all European poets since Goethe’s death dedicated their profoundest songs. It is from these, from Baudelaire, Swinburne and Nietzsche—not from ideologists delighting in progress, or businessmen thirsting for expansion, or unswerving careerists—that we get the fundamental mood of the period, that radical despair which suspected—long before Kipling put it into words—“When everyone is dead the great game is finished. Not before.” Half a generation before Kipling and a whole generation before the appearance of Spengler’s theories of the organically necessary rise and decline of cultures, Swinburne sang the disappearance of the human race.

Unblinded by theories, the poet, who speaks for the “children of the world,” must remain in touch with the real course of events. If the world is abandoned to the coercion of its own “natural” material laws, uninfluenced by the legislative powers of man, all that is left is that universal melancholy which, since the days of Ecclesiastes, has been the wisdom of this world. If man recognizes the enforced course of events as his own supreme law and

places himself at its disposal, then all he can do is prepare for the downfall of the human race. For only then can the necessary course of things, undisturbed and unimpeded by the freedom of man, reign in that “eternal return” which may be the law of a nature untouched by man. But in such a world man has no real place, and he cannot live in it as a human being—unless he changes it. The song of the “Germanen Untergang” (Downfall of the Germans) is only the vulgarized death-wish that all must come to feel who confide themselves to the “inevitable process” of history.

The Descent Into Nihilism

It is the imperialist mentality of the nineteenth century and after that Hobbes’ philosophy anticipated. If the naked brutality of this philosophy was not accepted until our time, it was because the French Revolution, with its conception of man as law-maker and *citoyen*, almost cut the ground away from under the notion of history as a necessary process.

In the present imperialist epoch the power philosophy of Hobbes has become the philosophy of the élite. They are now ready to admit quite freely that the thirst for power can be quenched only by destruction. This is the living source of the nihilism of our time, which has seen the superstition of progress replaced by the equally vulgar superstition of decline, and in which the fanatics of automatic progress have been transformed overnight into fanatics of automatic annihilation. We know today that it was only out of stupidity that the materialists could have been so complacent.

Anyone acquainted with European philosophy, which since the Greeks has defined essence by origin, might have anticipated—and anyone occupying himself with contemporary poets instead of with the tedious talk of contemporary positivists, scientists and politicians could have prophesied—that scientific materialism, “proving” man’s origin to be in Nothingness, i. e., in spiritually void matter, could end only in nihilism, in an ideology that looks toward the annihilation of man.

True, the philosophy of Hobbes contains nothing of modern racial doctrine (which, in addition to whipping up the mob, foreshadows in a most realistic way the forms of organization by which humanity can destroy itself). But his theory of state necessarily conceives of the relations between commonwealths as regulated by no law and of the nations as engaged in a perpetual war of all against all. Thus in principle it excludes the idea of humanity as a whole, and so eliminates the sole regulating principle of international law. It not only makes foreign policy arbitrary and lawless, but it

also affords the best possible theoretical foundation for all those naturalistic theorems that hold nations to be tribes separated from each other by nature, without any connection whatever. Without any sense of the solidarity of mankind, nations have in common only the instinct for self-preservation that man shares with the animal world. If the idea of humanity, of which the most expressive symbol is the unity of origin of the human species, is no longer valid, then the nations—which owe their very existence to man’s ability to organize his communal life politically—become races, natural, organic units. It then becomes possible to argue that these races may be descended from some other species of apes than the white race and are predestined by nature to war against each other and the white race eternally.

At any rate nothing in all this is at odds with the international tenets of present-day imperialism which begins by substituting the arbitrary decisions of bureaucrats for legal principles, administrative orders for government, and fiats for laws—until, drawing the last logical consequences, imperialism becomes the systematic destruction and organized mass-murder of whole peoples.

Apotheosis of Destruction

Destruction is the most radical form of domination as well as of possession. No philosophizing devotee of power has dared to express this with the same sublime detachment as Hobbes—founding the equality of man on his ability to kill. A social system based essentially on property cannot possibly proceed toward anything but the final destruction of all property; for one possesses definitely and for all time only what one destroys. And only what one possesses through destruction can be really and definitely dominated. For its own sake and for all our sakes, bourgeois society has never recognized nor actually accepted this last secret of power—until just now.

The seeming disparity between cause and effect which characterized the birth of imperialism is thus not a matter of accident. The occasion—superfluous capital created by over-accumulation, which needed the mob’s help to find safe and profitable investment—set in motion a force that had always been contained in the basic structure of bourgeois society, though hidden by nobler traditions. At the same time, completely unprincipled power-politics could not be practiced until a mass of people was available who were free of all principles and so numerous that state and society could not care for them. Add to this the fact that this mob could be organized only by imperialistic politicians, and inspired only by racial doctrines, and we can see how the

illusion arose that imperialism alone could settle the grave domestic, social, and economic problems of our time.

The more the initiative in the alliance between mob and capital passed to the mob, the more did imperialist ideology crystallize itself around anti-Semitism. The Jewish question had, indeed, already acquired a certain local importance during the development of the European national states, but it remained a matter of quite secondary importance as regards really large political issues. The mob, whose nature is defined by the fact that it has been shut out of the class system of society, as well as out of the national organization of the state, directed the full blast of its hatred chiefly against those who likewise stood outside society and only partly inside the national state—namely, the Jews. The mob viewed the Jew enviously as a luckier, more successful competitor.

With unexampled doctrinaire consistency, undisturbed by the question as to whether the Jews were sufficiently important to be made the focus of a political ideology, the leaders of the mob were quick to discover in them a group that was only outwardly incorporated in the national state, but in reality was organized internationally and bound together by blood. Paradoxically, but by an inevitable natural logic, the type of organization imputed to the Jews became a model for the racial imperialists. And that misbegotten forgery, the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” which taught how to undermine states and social systems, has had more influence on the political tactics of fascism than have had all the preachers of power, including even the self-confessed imperialistic racial ideologists.

The national state has so far been the strongest defense against the unlimited thirst for power created by bourgeois society; it has stood against the seizure of power by the mob and against the integration of imperialist policies in the structure of Western states. But the sovereignty of the state, which was once supposed to express the sovereignty of the people, is today threatened from all sides. The genuine hostility to it of the mob is matched by a mistrust no less genuine on the part of the people themselves, who no longer feel that the state represents them or guarantees their survival. With the failure of any broader human ideal to emerge, this fundamental feeling of insecurity was the strongest ally Hitler found in Europe at the beginning of the war, and it will not disappear merely with the downfall of Hitler-Germany.

The Threat of Suicide

The Nazis’ strategy during this war has set the stage for the first demonstration of the strategy of suicide. In Nazism we saw the first case of a thoroughgoing imperialist policy, whose lust for conquest is governed by the principle “All or Nothing,” and whose wars end in “Victory or Death.” And we also saw the workings of its peculiar, curious logic by which the All inevitable reverts to the Nothing, and even Victory cannot end but in Death. Following its own law, the power-accumulating machinery built by imperialism can only go on swallowing more and more territory, destroying more and more peoples, enslaving and involving more and more human beings—until finally it ends by devouring itself.

This inner law of imperialism, its hidden drive to suicide, its insane fascination with death as such, was revealed during this war in the mass-slaughter of the Jews. No matter what the rationale, real or alleged, for anti-Semitism might be, the building of death-factories, the diversion of so many millions of people into the machinery of mass-murder, made no conceivable sense in a war situation where all available forces were needed for actual fighting. Nothing could prove more conclusively than this senseless slaughter how deeply and intimately Victory and Death were intertwined. Global destruction and the suicide of mankind are not mere accidental results of political errors or war, to be avoided by more careful planning. They are inherent in the ethos of imperialism.

If imperialism is allowed to continue its course, it can hardly be expected to revert to its first harmless beginnings or to retain its more moderate forms. The military defeat of fascism, though a prerequisite for a normalization of politics, cannot prevent new experiments which will hardly differ from fascism in essence or result. They will inevitably take the same course: first, organization of the mob and terrorization of the people; then, mobilization of an “élite” ready to sacrifice everything to the greatness of events, the efficiency of a system, success “as such”; and at last all will culminate in extermination and suicide.

The organization of the mob will again find its essential dynamic in the transformation of nations into races, for there is no other unifying bond now available between individuals who have lost all natural connection with their fellow-men. If we should prove to lack the force to escape from the endless process of accumulation of power in which we seem imprisoned, then we will indeed face the real Downfall of the West.

It will come through racism. Its hallmark will be racism. Russians will be “Slavs,” the English “white men,” the Germans “Germanic” tribes and the

French the commanders of a “*force noire*”. This very change in nomenclature will in itself signify the end of Western mankind. For *race* is, politically speaking, not the beginning of mankind but its end, not the origin of peoples but their decay, not the natural birth of man, but his unnatural death.

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