

IMPERIALISM AND WORLD ECONOMY

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With an Introduction by V. I. LENIN



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INTRODUCTION *

By V. I. LENIN

THE importance and timeliness of the topic treated in the work of N. I. Bukharin require no particular elucidation. The problem of imperialism is not only a most essential one, but, we may say, it is the most essential problem in that realm of economic science which examines the changing forms of capitalism in recent times. Every one interested not only in economics but in any sphere of present-day social life must acquaint himself with the facts relating to this problem, as presented by the author in such detail on the basis of the latest available data. Needless to say that there can be no concrete historical analysis of the present war, if that analysis does not have for its basis a full understanding of the nature of imperialism, both from its economic and political aspects. Without this, it is impossible to approach an understanding of the economic and diplomatic situation of the last decades, and without such an understanding, it is ridiculous even to speak of forming a correct view on the war. From the point of view of Marxism, which most clearly expresses the requirements of modern science in general, one can only smile at the "scientific" value of a method which consists in culling from diplomatic "documents" or from daily political events only such isolated facts as would be pleasant and convenient for the ruling classes of one country, and parading this as a historic analysis of the war. Such is the case, for instance, with Plekhanov, who parted ways with Marxism altogether when, instead of analysing the fundamental characteristics and tendencies of imperialism as a system of the economic relations of modern highly developed, mature, and over-ripe capitalism, he started angling after bits of facts to please the Purshkeviches and the Milyukovs. Under such conditions the scientific concept of imperialism is

* This introduction was originally signed by Lenin with the pseudonym V. Ilyin.—*Ed.*

reduced to the level of a cuss-word addressed to the immediate competitors, rivals, and opponents of the two above-mentioned Russian imperialists, whose class basis is entirely identical with that of their foreign rivals and opponents. In these times of forsaken words, renounced principles, overthrown world conceptions, abandoned resolutions and solemn promises, one must not be surprised at that.

The scientific significance of N. I. Bukharin's work consists particularly in this, that he examines the fundamental facts of world economy relating to imperialism as a whole, as a definite stage in the growth of most highly developed capitalism. There had been an epoch of a comparatively "peaceful capitalism," when it had overcome feudalism in the advanced countries of Europe and was in a position to develop comparatively tranquilly and harmoniously, "peacefully" spreading over tremendous areas of still unoccupied lands, and of countries not yet finally drawn into the capitalist vortex. Of course, even in that epoch, marked approximately by the years 1871 and 1914, "peaceful" capitalism created conditions of life that were very far from being really peaceful both in the military and in a general class sense. For nine-tenths of the population of the advanced countries, for hundreds of millions of peoples in the colonies and in the backward countries this epoch was not one of "peace" but of oppression, tortures, horrors that seemed the more terrifying since they appeared to be without end. This epoch has gone forever. It has been followed by a new epoch, comparatively more impetuous, full of abrupt changes, catastrophes, conflicts, an epoch that no longer appears to the toiling masses as horror without end but is an end full of horrors.

It is highly important to have in mind that this change was caused by nothing but the direct development, growth, continuation of the deep-seated and fundamental tendencies of capitalism and production of commodities in general. The growth of commodity exchange, the growth of large-scale production are fundamental tendencies observable for centuries throughout the whole world. At a certain stage in the development of exchange, at a certain stage in the growth of large-scale production, namely, at the stage that was reached ap-

proximately at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, commodity exchange had created such an internationalisation of economic relations, and such an internationalisation of capital, accompanied by such a vast increase in large-scale production, that free competition began to be replaced by monopoly. The prevailing types were no longer enterprises freely competing inside the country and through intercourse between countries, but monopoly alliances of entrepreneurs, trusts. The typical ruler of the world became finance capital, a power that is peculiarly mobile and flexible, peculiarly intertwined at home and internationally, peculiarly devoid of individuality and divorced from the immediate processes of production, peculiarly easy to concentrate, a power that has already made peculiarly large strides on the road of concentration, so that literally several hundred billionnaires and millionnaires hold in their hands the fate of the whole world.

Reasoning theoretically and in the abstract, one may arrive at the conclusion reached by Kautsky (who, like many others, has parted ways with Marxism, but in a different manner), that the time is not far off when those magnates of capital will unite into one world trust which would replace the rivalries and the struggle of nationally limited finance capital by an internationally united finance capital. Such a conclusion, however, is just as abstract, simplified, and incorrect as an analogous conclusion, arrived at by our "Struveists" and "Economists" of the nineties of the last century. The latter, proceeding from the progressive nature of capitalism, from its inevitability, from its final victory in Russia, at times became apologetic (worshipping capital, making peace agreements with it, praising it instead of fighting it); at times became non-political (*i. e.*, rejected politics, or the importance of politics, denied the probability of general political convulsions, etc., this being the favourite error of the "Economists"); at times even preached "strike" pure and simple ("general strike" to them was the apotheosis of the strike movement; it was elevated to a position where other forms of the movement are forgotten or ignored; it was a *salto mortale* from capitalism to its destruction by strikes alone). There are indications that the undis-

puted progressiveness of capitalism, compared with the semi-philistine "paradise" of free competition, and the inevitability of imperialism with its final victory over "peaceful" capital in the advanced countries of the world, may at present lead to political and non-political errors and misadventures no less numerous or varied.

Particularly as regards Kautsky, his open break with Marxism has led him, not to reject or forget politics, nor to skim over the numerous and varied political conflicts, convulsions and transformations that particularly characterise the imperialist epoch; nor to become an apologist of imperialism; but to *dream about a "peaceful capitalism."* "Peaceful" capitalism has been replaced by unpeaceful, militant, catastrophic imperialism. This Kautsky is compelled to admit, for he admitted it as early as 1909 in a special work¹ in which he drew sound conclusions as a Marxist for the last time. If it is thus impossible simply, directly, and bluntly to dream of going from imperialism back to "peaceful" capitalism, is it not possible to give those essentially petty-bourgeois dreams the appearance of innocent contemplations regarding "peaceful" ultra-imperialism? If the name of ultra-imperialism is given to an international unification of national (or, more correctly, state-bound) imperialisms which "would be able" to eliminate the most unpleasant, the most disturbing and distasteful conflicts such as wars, political convulsions, etc., which the petty bourgeois is so much afraid of, then why not turn away from the present epoch of imperialism that has already arrived—the epoch that stares one in the face, that is full of all sorts of conflicts and catastrophes? Why not turn to innocent dreams of a comparatively peaceful, comparatively conflictless, comparatively non-catastrophic ultra-imperialism? And why not wave aside the "exacting" tasks that have been posed by the epoch of imperialism now ruling in Europe? Why not turn instead of dreaming that this epoch will perhaps soon be over, that perhaps it will be followed by a comparatively "peaceful" epoch of ultra-imperialism which demands no such "sharp" tactics? Kautsky says directly that at any rate "such a new [ultra-imperialist] phase of capitalism is thinkable. Whether,

¹ This is his pamphlet, *Der Weg zur Macht* [The Road to Power].

however, it can be realised, to answer this question we have not yet sufficient data." (*Neue Zeit*, April 30, 1915, p. 144.)¹

In this tendency to evade the imperialism that is here and to pass in dreams to an epoch of "ultra-imperialism," of which we do not even know whether it is realisable, there is not a grain of Marxism. In this reasoning Marxism is admitted for that "new phase of capitalism," the realisability of which its inventor himself fails to vouch for, whereas for the present, the existing phase of capitalism, he offers us not Marxism, but a petty-bourgeois and deeply reactionary tendency to soften contradictions. There was a time when Kautsky promised to be a Marxist in the coming restless and catastrophic epoch, which he was compelled to foresee and definitely recognise when writing his work in 1909 about the coming war. Now, when it has become absolutely clear that that epoch has arrived, Kautsky again only promises to be a Marxist in the coming epoch of ultra-imperialism, of which he does not know whether it will arrive! In other words, we have any number of his promises to be a Marxist some time in another epoch, not under present conditions, not at this moment. For to-morrow we have Marxism on credit, Marxism as a promise, Marxism deferred. For to-day we have a petty-bourgeois opportunist theory—and not only a theory—of softening contradictions. It is something like the internationalism for export prevailing in our days among ardent—ever so ardent!—internationalists and Marxists who sympathise with every expression of internationalism in the enemy's camp, anywhere but not at home, not among their allies; who sympathise with democracy as long as it remains a promise of their allies; who sympathise with the "self-determination of nations" but not of those that are dependent upon the nation honoured by the membership of the sympathiser—in a word, this is one of the thousand and one varieties of hypocrisy prevailing in our times.

Can one, however, deny that in the abstract a new phase of capitalism to follow imperialism, namely, a phase of ultra-imperialism, is "thinkable"? No. In the abstract one can think of such a phase. In practice, however, he who denies

¹ This passage is taken from Kautsky's article entitled "Zwei Schritte zum Umleeren," (Two Steps to Unleam), *Neue Zeit*, No. 5, 1915.

the sharp tasks of to-day in the name of dreams about soft tasks of the future becomes an opportunist. Theoretically it means to fail to base oneself on the developments now going on in real life, to detach oneself from them in the name of dreams. There is no doubt that the development is going *in the direction* of a single world trust that will swallow up all enterprises and all states without exception. But the development in this direction is proceeding under such stress, with such a tempo, with such contradictions, conflicts, and convulsions—not only economical, but also political, national, etc., etc.—that before a single world trust will be reached, before the respective national finance capitals will have formed a world union of “ultra-imperialism,” imperialism will inevitably explode, capitalism will turn into its opposite.

December, 1915.

PREFACE

THE essay to which we here call the attention of the reader represents an elaboration of an article published abroad in the almanac *Communist*. In due time, about two years ago, the manuscript was shipped from abroad to Russia. First it was subjected to a raid by the military censor, then it was mistakenly transmitted to the wrong publisher. After the Revolution of February-March, 1917, the manuscript was “found.” It was supposed to see the light of day in July, but the intelligence men and the cadets who raided our party printing plant, also took care of my manuscript. Much later it was rescued in a mutilated form; a large and highly valuable introduction by Comrade Lenin, to whom I here pay the debt of deep gratitude, was missing.¹

Due to the fact that the composition of this work dates back two years, the statistical figures are, naturally, antiquated, especially those relating to the effects of the war.

Unfortunately, I have had no occasion as yet to revise the manuscript and to furnish it with fresh statistical material. I have only re-written the missing pages and added the last chapter, which could not have appeared under the censor's rule.

The manuscript was written at a time when Socialism, crucified by capital and the “Socialist” traitors, was suffering the greatest possible humiliations. Soon after he had sent it to Russia, the author had ample time to ponder over revolutionary perspectives in the Swedish king's prison.

This preface is written at a moment when revolutionary Socialism has achieved its greatest victory in Russia.

It is the most ardent wish of the author that this book should soon be transformed from a weapon against imperialism into an historic document relegated to the archives.

November 25, 1917.

¹ The manuscript of the introduction, included in the present volume, was subsequently found and first published in the *Pravda*, January 21, 1927.—Ed.