

The Ideology of Late Imperialism

The Return of the Geopolitics of the Second International

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In 1990, when renowned Indian Marxian economist Prabhat Patnaik asked “Whatever Happened to Imperialism?,” once vibrant and influential schools of theories on imperialism were at a postwar historic low.¹ When he left the West to return to India in 1974, imperialism was at the center of all Marxist discussions. But when he came back to the West merely fifteen years later, imperialism already seemed out of fashion. After all, the end of the Soviet Union and liberals’ declaration of the end of history were near.

Marxists’ inquiries into the question of imperialism began in the early twentieth century. During the time of V. I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, Marxists focused on two related questions regarding imperialism: (1) inter-capitalist competition and war, and (2) the hierarchy within world capitalism and the relationship between the imperialist countries and the colonies/semi-colonies. Since then, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, the postwar anticolonial wave, and the Cold War have profoundly changed the context of imperialism. Following the last inter-imperialist war in the core in the 1940s, and with most colonies having gained independence, the political-economic relationship between the imperialist and non-imperialist countries became the key to theorising imperialism.



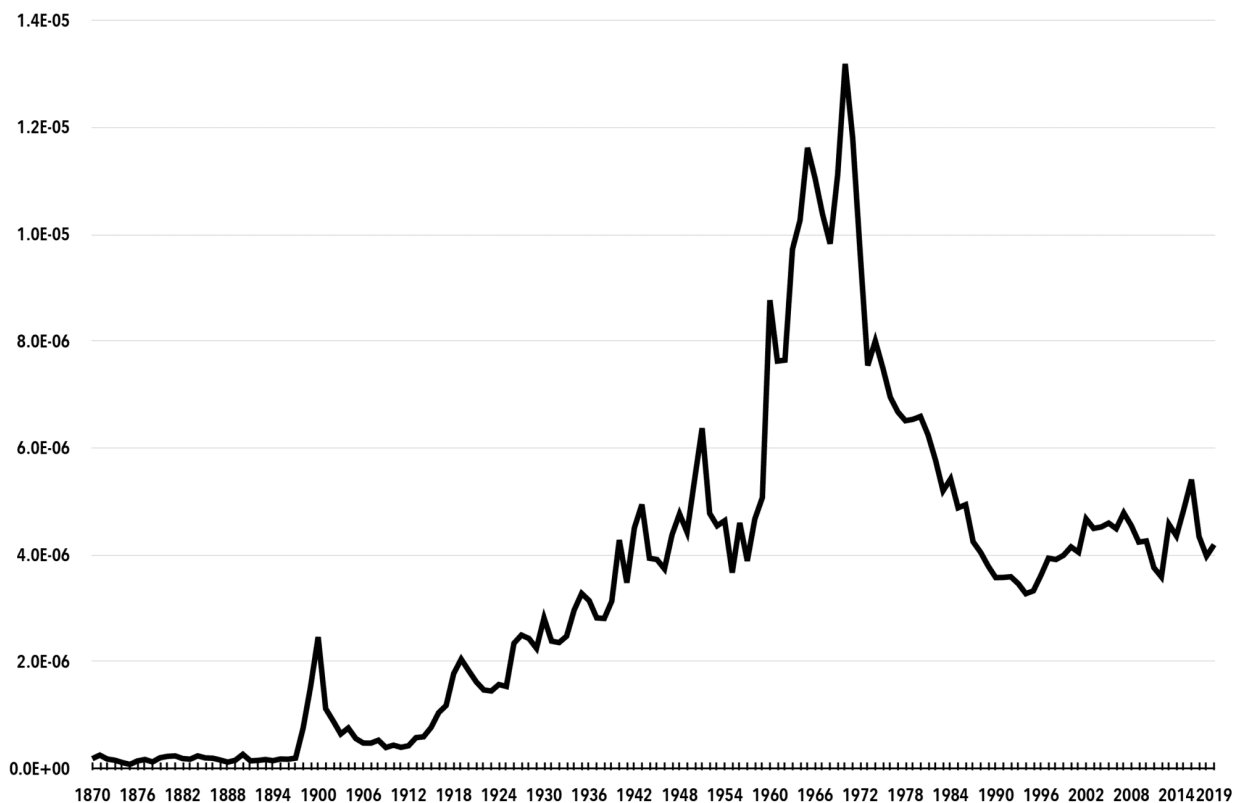
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¹ ↪ Prabhat Patnaik, “Whatever Happened to Imperialism?,” *Monthly Review* 42, no. 6 (November 1990): 1–7.

Since the 1950s, Marxist scholars have greatly deepened our understanding of imperialism by exploring underdevelopment and the centre-periphery, or dependency relationship, in world capitalism.² Paul Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth* is one of the earliest and best analyses of how feudal, imperialist, and comprador interests, as well as other unproductive uses of economic surplus, have kept back the third world. Later writers such as Samir Amin, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein each developed a distinct but related approach to the rise of capitalism. Instead of focusing on just Western Europe and the United States, they also explored how the global division of labour and the more general world system, or imperialist system, transferred surplus from the periphery to the center, thus creating both development and underdevelopment simultaneously.

Given this high tide of Marxist writings on imperialism in the 1960s and '70s, the disappearance of imperialism from leftist discussion is quite remarkable. According to Google Books data (see Chart 1), the frequency of the term imperialism in a large sample of English-language books declined by more than 50 percent between 1974 and 1990. Even before the demise of the Soviet Union or neoliberal transitions in much of the world, analyses of imperialism were already disappearing in the United States and elsewhere.

Chart 1. Frequency of *imperialism* in Google Books, 1870–2019 (English)



Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer, books.google.com/ngrams.

² Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957); Andre Gunder Frank, *The Development of Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966); Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); Arghiri Emmanuel, *Unequal Exchange* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1981).

Patnaik suggested that this waning might be because of the very strengthening and consolidation of imperialism after the

there was also a more direct development among Western liberal and leftist intellectuals, which aimed politically to diminish anti-imperialist writings.... Aside from a change in research interests among scholars, the retreat from the question of imperialism has above all facilitated the rise of conservative ideology framed as leftist discourse.

Vietnam War.³ This was evident from the tyranny of the global division of labour as well as the destructive functions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Besides these, there was also a more direct development among Western liberal and leftist intellectuals, which aimed politically to diminish anti-imperialist writings. Since the 1970s, well-known leftist writers such as Bill Warren, Robert Brenner, Michael

Hardt, Antonio Negri, and David Harvey have contributed to this kind of intellectual counterrevolution.

Aside from a change in research interests among scholars, the retreat from the question of imperialism has above all facilitated the rise of conservative ideology framed as leftist discourse. There has been a return of what we can call Second International politics, which essentially break from the Marxist traditions exemplified by Lenin and Mao Zedong, and severely limit revolutionary potential in the imperialist core.

Warren and the Disappearance of Analyses of Imperialism

One of the early critiques of the Marxist anti-imperialist tradition came from Warren, a former British Communist Party member who later joined the British and Irish Communist Organization. In 1973, Warren published a long article, "Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialisation," in the *New Left Review*.⁴ In the article, Warren sought to challenge the then common anti-imperialist view that imperialism, and more generally the expansion of capitalist relations globally, created dependency and underdevelopment in the third world. Warren was eager to show that the expansion of capitalism and imperialism brought progress (industrial and otherwise) to the third world. In Warren's words, "empirical observations suggest that the prospects for successful capitalist economic development [implying industrialisation] of a significant number of major underdeveloped countries are quite good." Although Warren acknowledged the existence of imperialism and even suggested his thesis was the same as Lenin's, he argued that "Lenin's general theory of imperialism was theoretically misconceived and historically inaccurate."

Warren's empirical results were reflective, on the one hand, of the postwar boom and the widespread national industrialisation projects undertaken by newly independent nations, and, on the other hand, of the rise of a few protégés of imperialism such as Taiwan and South Korea. But Warren was not content with just noting postwar prosperity. He went on to argue that the third world was undergoing independent industrialisation, with development increasingly domestically based and funded, encompassing a wide range of industries and the fading of Western technological superiority. He argued that, in the postwar era, the drain of surplus value from the periphery to the center does not mean anything, since it may simply be the price paid for the establishment of productive facilities. After all, "exploitation is the reverse side of the advance of productive forces."

Warren's anti-anti-imperialist politics were clear. He argued that socialists needed to examine the character of the anti-imperialist struggle much more closely and called for more attention to be paid to domestic class struggles in the third

³ ↪ Patnaik, "Whatever Happened to Imperialism?"

⁴ ↪ Bill Warren, "Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialization," *New Left Review* 81 (1973).

world. If the centre-periphery relationship was increasingly a thing of the past, then naturally anti-imperialism became simply a cover for inter-capitalist quarrels and bargaining.

Contrary to Warren's false optimism, the development of capitalism has produced a persistent, if not increasing, gap between the center and periphery. Soon after, Arghiri Emmanuel wrote a response to Warren, arguing that the latter overlooked the vast difference in industrialisation and agricultural mechanisation between rich countries and the third world.⁵

The growth of the third world depended on a small number of countries, for the benefit of a small fraction of their populations, which can only be understood in the context of imperialism.... The clear pattern suggests that the hierarchy and ranks within the capitalist world remained largely intact during the fifty-five years of so-called development.

Emmanuel argued that imperialism was self-reproducing rather than self-destructive, as Warren supposed, and it could only be attacked and destroyed by the working class outside the home countries of imperialism. In another response, Philip McMichael, James Petras, and Robert Rhodes not only showed that there was little evidence for independent industrialisation in the Global South, but also (correctly) forewarned the coming crisis of

balance of payments in the underdeveloped world.⁶ In conclusion, the three authors strongly argued that the growth of the third world depended on a small number of countries, for the benefit of a small fraction of their populations, which can only be understood in the context of imperialism. David Slater later pointed out a number of weaknesses in Warren's thesis, including Warren's Eurocentrism, bland acceptance of capitalist exploitation, and highly selective readings of Marxian texts.⁷

The actual development thus far does not substantiate Warren's thesis. Chart 2 plots the per capita national incomes measured in constant 2010 dollars in 1960 against the values in 2015. The clear pattern suggests that the hierarchy and ranks within the capitalist world remained largely intact during the fifty-five years of so-called development. The rich countries in 1960 are still at the top in 2015, while the poor countries back then still tended to be at the bottom a half century later. Based on the same data, the top twenty richest countries' average per capita income was a staggering 32 times the average income of the poorest twenty countries back in 1960; by 2015, the ratio had risen to 123.

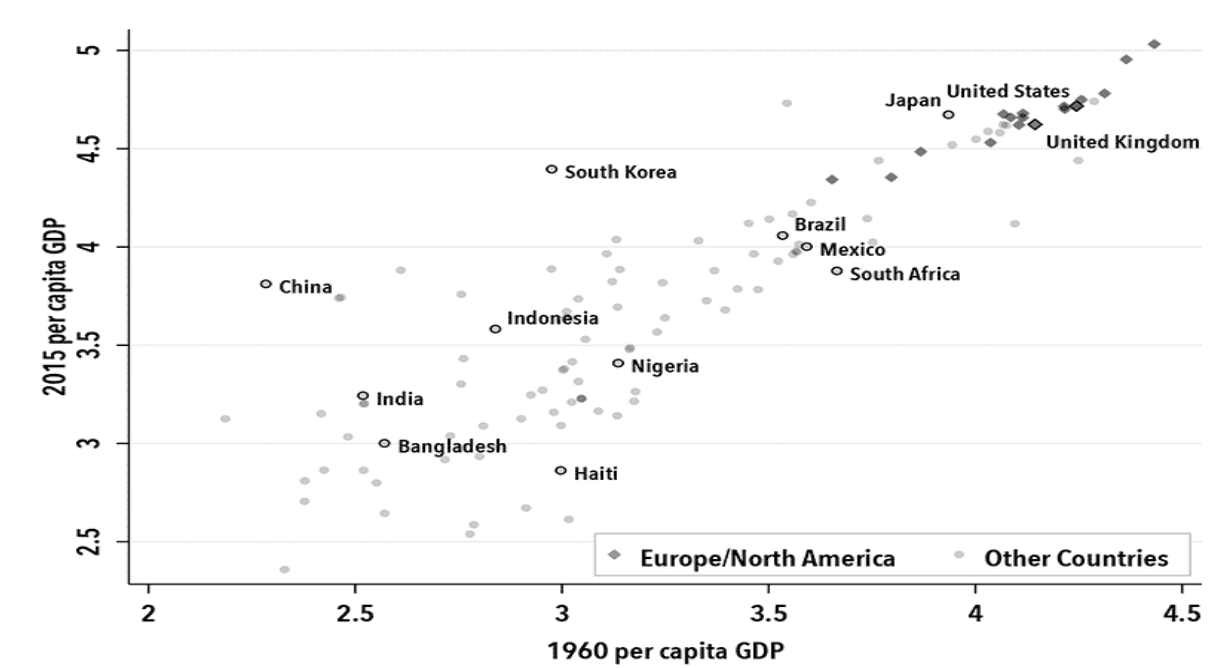
Of course, with imperialism supposedly "gone," the center's development and the periphery's underdevelopment would seem totally independent. Thus, Warren's thesis produced two main political implications. First, the lack of development or underdevelopment is each country's own problem. It probably comes from the refusal to join productive force-advancing globalisation, or from certain types of corruption, or from bad institutions or culture, or more precisely from poverty itself. Second, although the Global South or third world, from Lenin's time or even earlier, was the center of revolution and experiments of socialism, for Warren, it became a burden of development and aid, and a student of Western societies. The kind of Euro- or West-centric view that persisted in the global capitalist market echoed among the left.

⁵ ↪ Arghiri Emmanuel, "Myths of Development Versus Myths of Underdevelopment," *New Left Review* 85 (1974): 61–82.

⁶ ↪ Philip McMichael, James Petras, and Robert Rhodes, "Imperialism and the Contradictions of Development," *New Left Review* 85 (1974): 83–104.

⁷ ↪ David Slater, "On Development Theory and the Warren Thesis: Arguments Against the Predominance of Economism," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 5, no. 3 (1987): 263–82.

Chart 2. Hierarchy in World Capitalism



Source: World Bank database, databank.worldbank.org. Per capita gross domestic product is measured in log value, based on constant 2010 U.S. dollars.

Brenner's Intervention in the Transition Debate

If Warren's thesis signalled the conservative turn of Western leftists on more contemporary and global issues, then Robert Brenner, a trained historian, greatly enriched the story by reaffirming Eurocentrism and conservatism in the history of the transition to capitalism in Europe. This was clear from Brenner's long polemical piece, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," in the *New Left Review* in 1977.⁸

Brenner's article was partly a reappraisal of the famous debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism between Maurice Dobb, Paul Sweezy, and other Marxist scholars in the 1950s in *Science and Society*. Among other things, Sweezy and Dobb, while agreeing that both internal (class conflicts) and external (trade and towns) forces played important and interactive roles in the transition to capitalism, disagreed on the "primary emphasis" (Dobb) or "prime mover" (Sweezy). Sweezy argued that the driving force behind the transition in Western Europe was external, while Dobb maintained that internal forces determined the form and direction of the effects of trade and the market.⁹ Sweezy, who sparked the discussion, was looking for answers to political questions. In his words: "Now, I have a pretty good idea about the nature of the prime mover in the capitalist case, why the process of development which it generates leads to crisis, and why socialism is necessarily the successor form of society. But I was not at all clear about any of these factors

⁸ ↪ Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* 104 (1977).

⁹ ↪ Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Science and Society* 14, no. 2 (1950): 134–67.

in the feudal case when I sat down to Dobb's book."¹⁰ But overall, it is not clear that the original debate in itself was explicitly related to left politics in the postwar era. Nevertheless, the inspiration from and intellectual space generated by the debate probably facilitated later discussions on imperialism, dependency, and world-systems.

Aside from this debate, Sweezy, Baran, and Monthly Review authors paid great attention to the struggles and revolutions in the Global South. Writing in the late 1970s, Brenner clearly considered Frank and Wallerstein the main targets, but his article started with a critique of Sweezy's position from the 1950s. However, unlike anyone who took part in the original debate, including Dobb, Brenner completely rejected the role of trade and towns, and only accepted the role of agrarian change in bringing about capitalist social relations. He argued that trade would not by itself transform feudal social relations or serfdom, and only an autonomous change in class relations in the countryside would push trade toward capitalism. Following this, Brenner argued that Sweezy, Frank, and Wallerstein presumed the existence of capitalism when talking about the role of trade, division of labour, "competition," and "surplus maximisation." Brenner even called the focus on exchange (Sweezy) and division of labour (Frank and Wallerstein) neo-Smithian.

To be fair, not once did Sweezy refer to maximisation, a term Brenner wrongly attributed to Sweezy, to highlight what he

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deemed the ahistorical aspect of the argument. It was in fact British Marxist historian Rodney Hilton, in his reply to Sweezy, who suggested that surplus maximisation was the prime mover of the dynamics of feudalism.¹¹ In Hilton's words, "the ruling class in one way or the other...was striving to maximise feudal rent, that is the forcibly appropriated surplus of the direct producer, all the time." Hilton continues to explain that this maximisation was not for selling on the market, but fundamentally to "maintain and improve their positions

as rulers, against their innumerable rivals as well as against their exploited underlings."

Brenner's article is deeply flawed in at least three ways. First, Brenner accused Sweezy and Wallerstein of assuming away the transition process, but his alternative was to suggest the nonexistence of the transition. When Brenner talked about the impossibility of surplus maximisation in feudal society, his method was a metaphysical one that might reflect the influence of the analytical school at the time.¹² In his analysis, Brenner posits that feudal lords cannot have capitalist motives—because only capitalists have capitalist motives—but this crude binary model, like many popular bourgeois economic theories, implies that the transition to capitalism happened instantaneously. This could not be further from the truth. As Sweezy emphasised in his reply to Brenner, there were two centuries between the end of serfdom and the rise of capitalist agriculture, something with which Dobb also agreed.¹³ Ironically, this meant that Brenner himself had to assume the long transition away. As James Blaut later commented, "Brenner, like some other Marxists, holds to a very mystical conception of capitalism. Capitalism is conceived to be an entity, an essential thing. When it arrives, it does so complete and entire, as though it were a god descending from Olympus to govern human affairs."¹⁴

¹⁰ ↪ Paul Sweezy, "Comments on Professor HK Takahashi's 'Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,'" *Science and Society* 17, no. 2 (1953): 158–64.

¹¹ ↪ Rodney Hilton, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Science and Society* 17, no. 4 (1953): 340–48.

¹² ↪ Louis Proyect argues that Brenner was loosely related to analytical Marxism. See the very helpful discussion on the Brenner thesis and its political context on his webpage, available at Columbia.

¹³ ↪ Paul Sweezy, "Comment on Brenner," *New Left Review* 108 (1978): 94–95.

¹⁴ ↪ James Blaut, "Robert Brenner in the Tunnel of Time," *Antipode* 26, no. 4 (1994): 351–74.

Second, Brenner wrongly interpreted some key historical evidence. Wallerstein explained the second serfdom in Poland and Eastern Europe as a result of their incorporation into the world system as grain producers. In his attempt to reject the role of trade, Brenner suggested that grain export only played a minor role in the worsening of peasant conditions, as the earlier Polish grain trade was relatively small. As Robert Denemark and Kenneth Thomas carefully examined, although grain exports peaked only after re-feudalisation, significant increases in exports did precede the major attacks on serfs' legal status and ability to appeal to royal courts.¹⁵ By reporting improving terms of trade of Eastern-European agriculture versus Western industry, Brenner suggests that surplus actually flowed from the center to the periphery in the seventeenth century. Denemark and Thomas argued that changes in terms of trade cannot tell us anything about the surplus transfer, as they could be due to different productivity growth rates. They documented that the changes in terms of trade can be easily understood in the context of rising Dutch productivity and stagnant or declining Polish grain productivity in the seventeenth century.

Third, in his Eurocentric view of history, Brenner paid little attention to colonialism, military conquest, and their impact on class formation in most of the world. He also overlooked that many important attributes of late medieval rural England (untied peasantry, cash tenancy, peasant struggles, and so on) were present in the same period in many parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia.¹⁶ Kenneth Pomeranz, a non-Marxist economic historian, argued that England and the lower Yangtze Delta shared many key characteristics up to 1800, but colonial expansion and slavery in the Americas made England finally move ahead.¹⁷ Moreover, although Brenner's article seemingly put class struggle first among the factors that led to the rise of capitalism, his other writings suggest that only a peculiar kind of class struggle (in England) would lead to capitalism. For him, some degree of struggle was necessary to avoid a second serfdom, but not so much struggle that landlords lost ownership of land.¹⁸ Thus, Brenner's thesis "turns the class struggle theory on its head."¹⁹ Brenner's analysis basically argues that, since certain phenomena (a specific kind of class struggle, for example) coexisted with the rise of capitalism in England, the rise of capitalism in England must also be due to these same things. It is a typical kind of Eurocentrism based on circular logic.

Like Warren, Brenner rejected the relevance of imperialism and accused other Marxists of minimising "the degree to which any significant national development of the productive forces depends today upon a close connection with the international division of labour." Not only did he refuse to acknowledge surplus transfer from the third world to the center, but he also actually accused anti-imperialists of hanging onto the "utopia of socialism in one country," rejecting the Marxist-Leninist emphasis on the conservative labour aristocracy in the core and the revolutionary potentials in the third world.

Overall, to say that Warren and Brenner, among others, caused a major intellectual debate would be an exaggeration. There were discussions, for sure, but they were not remotely sufficient given the importance of the issue. As Denemark and Thomas noted, few authors have addressed the major attack from Brenner.²⁰ Slater argued that the influence of the

¹⁵ ↪ Robert Denemark and Kenneth Thomas, "The Brenner-Wallerstein Debate," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1988): 47–65.

¹⁶ ↪ Blaut, "Robert Brenner in the Tunnel of Time."

¹⁷ ↪ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ ↪ For example, see Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," *Past and Present* 70, no. 1 (1976): 30–75. This type of argument is not unique among racist and Eurocentric writings. For example, see Quamrul Ashraf and Oded Galor, "The 'Out of Africa' Hypothesis, Human Genetic Diversity, and Comparative Economic Development," *American Economic Review* 103, no. 1 (2013): 1–46. It follows the exact formula, just replacing class struggle with genetic diversity. Too much diversity (Africans) means less trust, but too little diversity (Native Americans) means less innovation. Only Eurasians with the right degree of genetic diversity, the argument goes, made it to lead the world.

¹⁹ ↪ Blaut, "Robert Brenner in the Tunnel of Time."

²⁰ ↪ Denemark and Thomas, "The Brenner-Wallerstein Debate."

Warren thesis was ultimately related to the fact that, since 1980, the dominant political climate has greatly facilitated militantly pro-capitalist positions.²¹ Indeed, the writings of Warren and Brenner coincided with, if not were consciously part of, the grand counterrevolutionary turn that eventually negated the revolutionary tide that began in the early twentieth century.

From The Communist Manifesto to the Second International

However dramatic the intellectual shifts happening around 1980 seemed to be, they were a return to the long Eurocentrist tradition among Western socialists, exemplified by those in the Second International. The period beginning with Lenin and Luxemburg and ending with Mao and the Cultural Revolution was but a short interruption. Warren and Brenner, for example, were both interested in breaking away from more “recent Marxist ideas” and returning to the Marxism that supposedly had a more positive view of the spread of capitalism.

What Marxism were they talking about? The famous passages of The Communist Manifesto, which Brenner quoted, did express high optimism about the revolutionary role of capitalism:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.²²

As is often quoted, Karl Marx believed that British colonial control caused immense damage to the Indian people: “England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history.”²³ But Marx in the early 1850s was still somewhat hopeful that Britain’s actions might indirectly and inadvertently lead to India’s advance in that “whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.”

That optimism, possibly inflated in a political declaration, might have been appropriate for its time. The progressive role of capitalism was still in place before the Paris Commune. As Lenin later succinctly summarised, “the period between 1789 and 1871 was one of progressive capitalism when the overthrow of feudalism and absolutism, and liberation from the foreign yoke were on history’s agenda,” but the capitalist imperialist age after 1871 was “one of ripe and rotten-ripe capitalism.”²⁴ As numerous thinkers have pointed out since the late 1960s, most notably by Kevin Anderson in *Marx at the Margins*, Marx’s thoughts with regard to colonialism evolved beginning in the late 1850s, particularly after the 1857 Indian Revolt. The rise of significant resistance movements in much of the colonised world led him to focus more on

²¹ ↪ Slater, “On Development Theory and the Warren Thesis.”

²² ↪ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 9.

²³ ↪ Karl Marx, “The British Rule in India,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 12 (1853; repr. New York: International Publishers, 1979), 125–33.

²⁴ ↪ I. Lenin, “Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International,” in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 22 (1916; repr. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 108–20.

potentials of revolution outside Western Europe and North America.²⁵ In his famous letter to Vera Zasulich in 1881, Marx expressed that the Russian non-capitalist rural commune could be “the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia.”²⁶ Here, Marx clearly would disagree with Euro-Marxists such as Brenner and Warren. Frederick Engels, in his letter to Karl Kautsky in 1882, also made the following claim: “as to what social and political phases these countries will then have to pass through before they likewise arrive at socialist organisation, we to-day can only advance rather idle hypotheses, I think. One thing alone is certain: the victorious proletariat can force no blessings of any kind upon any foreign nation without undermining its own victory by so doing. Which of course by no means excludes defensive wars of various kinds.”²⁷

More importantly, both Marx and Engels, from the days of the 1848 revolutions, were consciously developing a dialectical view of history and exploring the connection between revolutionary potential, labour aristocracy, and weak links in Europe. This is evident from their work with the Communist League, for which The Communist Manifesto was written.

As Engels recollected, the League was mostly comprised of German immigrant workers and artisans, in particular male tailors.²⁸ These immigrant workers were everywhere and Engels documented that German was “so much the prevailing tongue in this trade” in Paris. Despite the guild tradition and the influential prospect of becoming a master, communist ideas gradually developed among these workers. It was the organisation of these workers and others that started the first German communist workers’ movement, as well as “the first international workers’ movement of all time.”

The history of the Communist League recorded by Engels is particularly useful. Despite the activities in London, the League was not based on English workers or unions. It was not England, the first and most developed industrial capitalist country, that produced the communist workers’ movement. Rather, the epicentre of the world communist revolution was in a not-yet-unified Germany, “a country of handicraft and of domestic industry based on hand labour.”²⁹ In The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels stated that “the Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution...the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.”

The long prosperity, the acceptance of trade unions, improvement in real wages and working conditions, and the expansion of suffrage all strengthened the political alliance between capitalists and mainstream unions and activists. Increasingly, workers in the imperialist nations shared part of the fruits of imperialist super-profits as a result of surplus transfer from the third world.

The English working class, despite its advanced material conditions and a long history of struggle, did not emerge as a leading force in the later international workers’ movement. In his letter in 1870, Marx observed that the revolutionary potential of English workers was severely limited by the existence of British peripheries such as Ireland and the colonial alliance between English workers and capitalists. In Marx’s words: “The ordinary English

²⁵ ↪ Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).). Among the thinkers who presented the same thesis as Anderson, see: Horace B. Davis, *Nationalism and Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 59–73; Earl Ofari, “Marxism, Nationalism, and Black Liberation,” *Monthly Review* 22, no. 10 (March 1971): 18–34; Kenzo Mohri, “Marx and ‘Underdevelopment,’” *Monthly Review* 30, no. 11 (April 1979): 32–42; Suniti Kumar Ghosh, “Marx on India,” *Monthly Review* 35, no. 8 (January 1984): 39–53; John Bellamy Foster, “Marx and Internationalism,” *Monthly Review* 52, no. 3 (July–August 2000): 11–22.

²⁶ ↪ Karl Marx, “Marx to Vera Zasulich,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 46 (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 71.

²⁷ ↪ Frederick Engels, “Engels to Karl Kautsky,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 46, 320–23.

²⁸ ↪ Frederick Engels, “On the History of the Communist League,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 26 (New York: International Publishers, 1990), 312–30.

²⁹ ↪ Engels, “On the History of the Communist League.”

worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation.... This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.”³⁰

If identification with the ruling nation was more of a prejudice early on, it later acquired a much more solid material basis as a labour aristocracy started to emerge with imperialism. The long prosperity, the acceptance of trade unions, improvement in real wages and working conditions, and the expansion of suffrage all strengthened the political alliance between capitalists and mainstream unions and activists. Increasingly, workers in the imperialist nations shared part of the fruits of imperialist super-profits as a result of surplus transfer from the third world.

When Engels wrote the preface for the 1892 edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, he acknowledged changes in two sections of the working class—factory workers and union members—since the first publication of the book in 1845.³¹ He explained their conservative politics thus: “they form an aristocracy among the working-class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final.” This was precisely why, in his letter to August Bebel in 1883, Engels strongly dismissed the potentials of the revolutionary movement in Britain. “Do not on any account whatever let yourself be deluded into thinking there is a real proletarian movement going on here,” he warned Bebel. “A really general workers’ movement will only come into existence here when the workers are made to feel the fact that England’s world monopoly is broken.”³² Even though the benefits English workers received were probably pathetically small, “participation in the domination of the world market was and is the basis of the political nullity of the English workers.” Thus, the English working class began to tail the Liberal Party, recognising trade unions and strikes, as well as supporting more humane working conditions and working-class voting rights.³³

These important insights were already preparing the ground for Lenin’s theories of imperialism and the weak link. Throughout their lives, Marx and Engels looked to the less developed Germany. For a long time, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), as Lenin once commented, “upheld the revolutionary standpoint in Marxism.”³⁴ As Germany emerged as a major imperialist power, however, German socialism also changed considerably.

This was already evident in the rise of Eduard Bernstein and revisionism in the party and the Second International. Equipped with a type of fatalism that equated revolution with the coming collapse of capitalism, the SPD mainstream led by Bebel and Kautsky was content with competing for seats in the Reichstag before the great day of socialist revolution.³⁵ Based on the prosperity of German imperialism, trade unionists in the party became strong reformist forces and their political neutrality gradually prevailed.³⁶ There was also a lack of Marxist education in the SPD, and while more people voted for socialism, most party members had a different idea of what socialism could be.³⁷ Rank-and-file SPD members

³⁰ ↪ Karl Marx, “K. Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 43 (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 471–76.

³¹ ↪ Frederick Engels, preface to *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, 1892 English ed., in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27 (New York: International Publishers, 1990), 257–69.

³² ↪ Frederick Engels, “Engels to August Bebel,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 47 (New York: International Publishers, 1995), 52–55.

³³ ↪ Engels, “Engels to August Bebel.”

³⁴ ↪ I. Lenin, “The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart,” in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 82–93.

³⁵ ↪ Roger Fletcher, *Revisionism and Empire: Socialist Imperialism in Germany 1897–1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 14.

³⁶ ↪ Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 15, 26–27.

³⁷ ↪ Fletcher, *Revisionism and Empire*, 28.

around the turn of the century were experiencing improving conditions and were reading mostly capitalist news and travelogues, war stories, and ethnographic exotica from the German colonial expansion.³⁸

As a longtime deputy of the SPD in the Reichstag, Bernstein's view at least represented the right wing of the party. Bernstein saw imperialism as something novel, parallel to capitalism and progressive in 1900. By 1912, his position remained largely the same: imperialism was basically progressive despite being related to some capitalist interests.³⁹ In Bernstein's view, British imperialism was democratic, thus it was worthy of approval and emulation, while the undemocratic Wilhelmine German imperialism was reactionary and dangerous.⁴⁰ It was Bernstein who pleaded for the infamous socialist colonial policy, which became a hotly debated issue during the Second International Congress in Stuttgart in 1907.

The Stuttgart congress was an important event in the history of the international workers' movement. Lenin praised the wide representation of the congress: 884 delegates from twenty-five nations and five continents.⁴¹ Although the congress "marked the final consolidation of the Second International...which exercise[d] very considerable influence on the nature and direction of socialist activities throughout the world," Lenin commented on the "remarkable and sad feature" of German social democracy taking a clear conservative and opportunistic turn.⁴²

The German delegates to the Second International Congress were marked by their conservatism and revisionism. Overall, the opportunistic force was strong among the Western European delegates. The pro-colonial group, including Van Kol of Holland, Bernstein, and Eduard David of Germany, dominated the committee on colonialism.⁴³ They

English workers in Marx's time and German workers in Lenin's time turned out to be unable to play a leading role in the struggle for socialism. Pro-colonial and pro-imperialist politics clearly had firm control over the leading workers' parties and trade unions in the imperialist countries.

introduced the "majority resolution" that stated that the benefits of colonies for the working class were exaggerated and that the congress did not reject colonialism on principle since it could operate as a civilising force.⁴⁴ This much retreat from socialist principles was "monstrous," in Lenin's words, and we can see parts of these statements reemerging, in a slightly different fashion, in the theses developed by Warren and Brenner. Lenin commented that the concept of socialist colonial policy (from Bernstein and others)

was "a hopeless muddle," and explained that "socialism has never refused to advocate reforms in the colonies as well; but this can have nothing in common with weakening our stand in principle against conquests, subjugation of other nations, violence, and plunder, which constitute 'colonial policy.'"⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, the delegates' country's position in the capitalist system strongly influenced their votes during the congress. The French, British, and Italians were split in the voting, while the Germans, governed by the unanimity rule,

³⁸ ↪ Fletcher, *Revisionism and Empire*, 30–34; John Short, "Everyman's Colonial Library: Imperialism and Working-Class Readers in Leipzig, 1890–1914," *German History* 21, no. 4 (2003): 445–75.

³⁹ ↪ Fletcher, *Revisionism and Empire*, 155.

⁴⁰ ↪ Fletcher, *Revisionism and Empire*, 157.

⁴¹ ↪ Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart."

⁴² ↪ Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart."

⁴³ ↪ Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart"; Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 84.

⁴⁴ ↪ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 84.

⁴⁵ ↪ Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart."

all voted for the pro-colonial resolution.⁴⁶ It was the votes from the non-colonial countries that made the “minority resolution” carry the congress, but it was a very close vote indeed: 127 to 108.⁴⁷

The right turn of the SPD and other European socialist parties continued after the 1907 Second International Congress. It only took another few years for the leading parties, such as the SPD, to openly betray the revolution and decide to support the First World War. The Second International and its politics collapsed on de facto terms.

English workers in Marx’s time and German workers in Lenin’s time turned out to be unable to play a leading role in the struggle for socialism. Pro-colonial and pro-imperialist politics clearly had firm control over the leading workers’ parties and trade unions in the imperialist countries. From Marx and Engels to Lenin, socialists were always trying to tap into the revolutionary potential against capitalism. The long and brutal struggles against opportunism gradually developed into the Leninist insight that revolution and a new socialist society will not first come from the center of capitalism where the labour aristocracy is strong and the workers and petty bourgeoisie tend to be more conservative due to imperialism. The actual socialist revolutions of the twentieth century started from the underdeveloped part of Europe (Russia) and more generally from the underdeveloped part of the world (China and other third world countries). In terms of forces of

Many influential leftists, such as Hardt, Negri, and Harvey, however, continue to reproduce the old conservative geopolitics in a refurbished bottle in discussions of the “new imperialism.”

productions, Western European countries were the most advanced, but in terms of revolutionary politics, as brilliantly summarised by Lenin in 1913, Europe was backward and Asia advanced. The third world independence and socialist revolutions, and consequently the weakening of imperialism,

naturally would serve as a precondition for socialist revolutions in the imperialist core. The international left from the years of the Communist International to the Mao Zedong era largely adhered to this line until similar Second International politics started to regain their old glory in the late 1970s.

Isn’t That Country Also Imperialist? Contradictions in the “New Imperialism” Narrative

Discussions of imperialism largely faded away starting in the late 1970s, but have reemerged since the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially given the current global economic crisis. Important research on late imperialism, or the

As John Bellamy Foster argues, Hardt and Negri’s book is a left-wing version of the “end of history” narrative, which packaged U.S. foreign policy in Marxian and postmodern terms.

imperialism of the global labour arbitrage under generalised monopoly-finance capital, has recently been published by Samir Amin, John Smith, Utsa Patnaik, Prabhat Patnaik, and Intan Suwandi.⁴⁸ Many influential leftists, such as Hardt, Negri, and Harvey, however, continue to reproduce the old

conservative geopolitics in a refurbished bottle in discussions of the “new imperialism.”

As an example, in their book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri argued that imperialism actually creates a straitjacket for capital and capital must eventually overcome it.⁴⁹ This argument is essentially an updated version of the Bernstein/Warren/Brenner thesis, which suggests that capitalism has moved beyond the phase of imperialism. What replaced imperialism

⁴⁶ ↪ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 85.

⁴⁷ ↪ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 84–85.

⁴⁸ ↪ Samir Amin, *Modern Imperialism, Monopoly Finance Capital, and Marx’s Law of Value* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018); Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, *A Theory of Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); John Smith, *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016); Intan Suwandi, *Value Chains: The New Economic Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019).

⁴⁹ ↪ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 243.

was Empire, a horizontal, de-centred, and de-territorialising world capitalism.⁵⁰ As John Bellamy Foster argues, Hardt and Negri's book is a left-wing version of the "end of history" narrative, which packaged U.S. foreign policy in Marxian and postmodern terms.⁵¹

Hardt and Negri, unlike Warren, did not base their conclusions on empirical evidence. In one part of the book, they rejected the theory of imperialism by reinterpreting the debate between Lenin and Kautsky in the 1910s, misleadingly arguing that Kautsky's ultra-imperialism thesis was more in line with Marx's work. They also claimed that Lenin basically agreed with Kautsky analytically about the trend of ultra-imperialism, although he came to a different conclusion as to what the revolutionary response should be. For Hardt and Negri, the real choice implicit in Lenin's work was between global communist revolution or Empire (a new name for ultra-imperialism).⁵²

If Lenin did agree with the future of a stable world capitalism, then the subsequent revolutions would seem desperate actions to prevent the realisation of ultra-imperialism. When Lenin wrote the preface to Nikolai Bukharin's 1915 *Imperialism and World Economy*, he had not yet finished his most decisive writings on imperialism. Thus, Lenin was mainly criticising the opportunistic implications of Kautsky's ultra-imperialism.⁵³ While not explicitly refuting the theorisation of a new phase of capitalism after imperialism, Lenin nevertheless pointed out that such a vision, in practice, meant turning away from contemporary problems. In 1916, when he wrote *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin clearly denied the possibility of an ultra-imperialist future as the unevenness of capitalist development and changing relative strength prohibits any stable coalition, alliance, or empire.⁵⁴

Harvey and others have produced a weaker version of the Bernstein/Warren/Brenner thesis. Namely, that there may be still imperialism and surplus transfer from the periphery to the core, but either the core is constantly recruiting new

Imperialism does not refer to fast growth or export gains, but to the relationship between the core and the rest of the world.

members, or the core and periphery relationship can be reversed thanks to capitalist development. For example, Harvey believes that the draining of net wealth from the East to the West has been largely reversed in recent decades.⁵⁵ Based on his own work on super-

exploitation and imperialism, Smith put forth a powerful critique of Harvey's denial of imperialism.⁵⁶ In his response, Harvey claimed that traditional (fixed and rigid) Marxian theory of imperialism was inadequate for understanding the complexity of capitalism.⁵⁷ However, Harvey's proposed method basically treats trade surplus or faster gross domestic product growth as evidence of imperialism. This is rather superficial and reductive, as imperialism does not refer to fast growth or export gains, but to the relationship between the core and the rest of the world. As is well known, at times, colonies or peripheries can have huge surpluses from trade, such as Jamaica due to slavery. In terms of income growth rates, between 1850 and 1900, countries such as Poland and Chile maintained about a 2 percent growth rate of per

⁵⁰ ↪ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xii.

⁵¹ ↪ John Bellamy Foster, "Late Imperialism: Fifty Years After Harry Magdoff's *The Age of Imperialism*," *Monthly Review* 71, no. 3 (July–August 2019): 1–19.

⁵² ↪ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 230, 461.

⁵³ ↪ I. Lenin, preface to Nikolai Bukharin's *Imperialism and World Economy*, in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 22, 103–7.

⁵⁴ ↪ I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 22, 185–304.

⁵⁵ ↪ David Harvey, "[Realities on the Ground: David Harvey Replies to John Smith](#)," *Review of African Political Economy*, February 5, 2018.

⁵⁶ ↪ Smith, *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century*; John Smith, "[David Harvey Denies Imperialism](#)," *Review of African Political Economy*, January 10, 2018.

⁵⁷ ↪ Harvey, "Realities on the Ground."

capita gross domestic product, almost 100 percent higher than the British or French growth rate during this early imperialist phase.⁵⁸

Harvey defines imperialism as a contradictory fusion of a territory-based political project and the expansion of capitalism through space and time. The first part refers to an abstract and ahistorical territorial logic while the second implies a diffusionist view of capitalism. Without any mention of the centre-periphery relationship or the transfer of surplus, the flat-world fluid capitalism in Harvey's understanding of what he calls The New Imperialism is virtually the same as Warren's, Brenner's, and that of the Second International theorists.⁵⁹ Precisely because of this starting point, it is easy for Harvey to treat any geographical change in industrial activities as the changing center of imperialism. For example, Harvey now talks about East Asia as a rising imperialist force, but, as Smith points out, in earlier writings Harvey was already talking about the power shift to the so-called newly industrialising countries such as India, Egypt, and Hungary.⁶⁰

Many of these discussions (including Harvey's) explicitly or implicitly refer to China as a rising imperialist power, even

Imperialism ultimately involves a transfer of surplus from the periphery to the imperialist center. Despite its fast growth, China has not been in a position to extract such profits... China is best described as a semi-peripheral country in the capitalist world system.

rivalling the United States in some accounts. It has become somewhat bipartisan fashion among conservatives and liberals to stand against so-called imperialist China. Interestingly, the U.S. State Department also emphasises China's imperialism in its official statements.⁶¹ The peculiar consensus is itself a result of the confusion and distortion on the imperialism question since the 1970s.

Let us examine the case of China more closely. Imperialism ultimately involves a transfer of surplus from the periphery to

As a semi-peripheral country, China played a complementing role to the imperialist center... While China has accumulated enormous assets, close to half are foreign reserves, which constitute China's informal tribute to U.S. imperialism... Chinese elites are self-conscious that they have benefited immensely from the current division of labour in the global economy which often makes them more avid than many others in defending the U.S.-led world order.

the imperialist center. Despite its fast growth, China has not been in a position to extract such profits. In a comprehensive study, Minqi Li points out that, although China has developed an exploitative relationship with some raw material exporters, on the whole, China continues to transfer a greater amount of surplus value to the core countries in the capitalist world system than it receives from the periphery.⁶² China is best described as a semi-peripheral country in the capitalist world system.

As a semi-peripheral country, China has been mostly playing a complementing, instead of competing, role in relation to the imperialist center. In terms of exports, China is mostly competing with lower-income countries. Workers in China earn much less than their U.S. counterparts with similar skills, though the difference has narrowed. Based on the World Input-Output Database, Suwandi, R. Jamil Jonna, and Foster showed that Chinese unit labour costs remained around 40

⁵⁸ ↪ Calculated based on the Maddison Project database. See Jutta Bolt, Robert Inklaar, Herman de Jong, and Jan Luiten van Zanden, "Rebasing 'Maddison': New Income Comparisons and the Shape of Long-Run Economic Development" (Groningen Growth and Development Centre Research Memorandum 174, University of Groningen, January 2018).

⁵⁹ ↪ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 26.

⁶⁰ ↪ Smith, "David Harvey Denies Imperialism."

⁶¹ ↪ For example, see "Secretary Michael R. Pompeo at a Press Availability," U.S. Department of State, July 15, 2020.

⁶² ↪ Minqi Li, "China: Imperialism or Semi-Periphery?" (working paper, Department of Economics, University of Utah, 2020).

percent of U.S. unit labour costs between 1995 and 2014, despite some moderate increase in more recent years.⁶³ This difference has served as the basis for the global labour arbitrage and unequal exchange.

We can also look at China's capital export abroad. China's foreign direct investment outflow as a percentage of gross capital formation was 1.9 percent in 2019, while the world average was 6 percent.⁶⁴ The majority of this investment went to Hong Kong and some tax havens, either as capital flight or repackaged as foreign capital to enter mainland China again. While China has accumulated enormous overseas assets over the years, close to half are foreign reserves in 2018, which in essence constitute China's informal tribute to U.S. imperialism by paying for the latter's "seigniorage privilege."⁶⁵

Some might argue that even though China is not imperialist now, it may grow to be. This view might be too confident in imperialism's capacity to absorb such a large population into its center. As Li notes, a hypothetical Chinese imperialism means a dramatic increase in surplus transfer from the periphery that is unlikely to be possible, both economically and ecologically.⁶⁶

For the most part, Chinese elites are self-conscious that they have benefited immensely from the current division of labour in the global economy and have a strong desire to maintain the status quo.⁶⁷ This consensus among Chinese elites often makes them more avid than many others in defending the U.S.-led world order.

In sum, two of the recent versions of the Bernstein/Warren/Brenner thesis—popularised by Hardt, Negri, and Harvey—are unable to provide a better understanding of world capitalism. With these theories, anti-imperialist struggles fuse into inter-imperialist rivalries. More importantly, they signal a revival of Second International politics that have been at the root of leftist and social democratic thought from the nineteenth century.

The Second International Strikes Back

To argue that some countries are not imperialist is not necessarily a defence of the status quo or social relations of those countries. It is to argue that surplus transfer and imperialist exploitation deepen the contradictions in those non-

When some leftists deny or give up the Marxist theory of imperialism, capitalism becomes a vibrant evolving system without end instead of a system of decay and parasitism. Thus, they often become unable to see the revolutionary potential in much of the world.

imperialist countries. Even fulfilling the basic needs of health and education for working people would require a socialist breakthrough. Certain third world countries—especially those with weaker and more incompetent ruling classes, as well as those with strong revolutionary legacies—could constitute the potential weak link in the contemporary imperialist system. In these places, people's struggles against U.S. imperialism are real

and potentially revolutionary.

⁶³ ↪ Intan Suwandi, R. Jamil Jonna, and John Bellamy Foster. "Global Commodity Chains and the New Imperialism," — The Jus Semper Global Alliance, May 2019.

⁶⁴ ↪ Based on the World Investment Report 2020, the United Nations conference on trade and development, unctad.org.

⁶⁵ ↪ Li, "China."

⁶⁶ ↪ Li, "China."

⁶⁷ ↪ Thus, China has become a leading defender of globalization in recent years. The Chinese state sometimes even preaches the benefits of the current U.S.-led world to the United States. For example, see 乐玉成,人民日报人民要论: 牢牢把握中美关系发展的正确方向, *People's Daily*, September 7, 2020.

When some leftists deny or give up the Marxist theory of imperialism, capitalism becomes a vibrant evolving system without end instead of a system of decay and parasitism. Thus, they often become unable to see the revolutionary potential in much of the world. Since capitalism seems invincible and socialism and communism seem completely out of reach, it is not surprising that Second International politics are permeating this general atmosphere of disillusion.

Contemporary Second International politics entail two complementary lines of thinking. First, given the longevity of capitalism, it is argued that the best scenario for the world is to have a better capitalism. Here, better often refers to measures such as freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, multiparty electoral systems, secure private property, and other features of bourgeois society often observed in the imperialist center. When progress is (again) defined as diffusion and imitation of the United States or Western European capitalism, “progressives” very quickly join forces with imperialist governments in their attacks against the countries in the periphery or semi-periphery. While the Second International theorists did not in principle oppose colonialism and imperialism, today’s liberals do not in principle oppose sanctions and regime-change operations in the third world. For many of these writers, who often claim to be Marxists, the primary concern is not to overthrow capitalism, but to get rid of so-called authoritarian capitalism, a recent term for “uncivilised” society.

The second line in contemporary Second International politics focuses on the question of imperialism. If some writers easily count China among those in the imperialist center, imperialism as a phase of capitalism surely looks like a never-ending nightmare. Since there is no real alternative, it makes sense to choose a better version of the nightmare. Just like Bernstein, who argued for distinguishing between good and bad imperialism, contemporary writers like Harvey are also advocating for a reformed, better imperialism.

Harvey argued that, though there are more radical solutions, the construction of a new New Deal led by the United States and Europe, both domestically and internationally, is surely enough to fight for now. In this respect, he went so far as to justify a “more benevolent ‘New Deal’ imperialism, preferably arrived at through the sort of coalition of capitalist powers that Kautsky long ago envisaged.”⁶⁸ For Harvey, this New Deal imperialism would supposedly be more benign than the bad imperialism offered by neoconservatives.

Harvey’s conservatism has kept growing since then, and it is not a coincidence that he expressed a particularly reactionary view in an interview in late 2019. In the interview, he argues that capital is too big to fail, explaining that:

*we cannot imagine a situation where we would shut down the flow of capital, because if we shut down the flow of capital, 80 percent of the world’s population would immediately starve, would be rendered immobile, would not be able to reproduce themselves in very effective ways. So, we cannot afford any kind of sustained attack upon capital accumulation. So the kind of fantasy that you might have had—socialists, or communists, and so on, might have had back in 1850, which is that well, okay, we can destroy this capitalist system and we can build something entirely different—that is an impossibility right now.*⁶⁹

With this kind of thinking dominant among liberals and many leftists, possible domestic resistance to the U.S. imperialist state is reduced. This particularly illuminates the ongoing conflicts between the United States and China. The image of a rising China, an imperialist (yet not quite civilised) China, interestingly caters to different groups in both China and the

⁶⁸ ↪ Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 209–11.

⁶⁹ ↪ David Harvey, “[Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: Global Unrest](#),” *Democracy at Work*, December 19, 2019.

United States. For years, the nationalist media in China has been bragging about a powerful China as an effort to reduce militancy among working people. Chinese leftists are mostly highly critical of such nationalist claims. At the same time, U.S. mainstream and the right wing have been successfully making their case based on the propaganda of an imperialist China. Utilising deep-rooted racism and anticommunist history, it serves the goal of scapegoating China and corrupting the U.S. working class. Even some leftist observers have uncritically argued that China now has become the number one enemy to the global working class. We are seeing the formation of a holy alliance in the imperialist United States dominated by reactionary Second International politics.

Prabhat Patnaik warned that the retreat of analyses of imperialism would only mean the strengthening of the right wing in the core countries and Global South, helping to spawn racist, fundamentalist, and xenophobic movements.

Prabhat Patnaik warned that the retreat of analyses of imperialism would only mean the strengthening of the right wing in the core countries and Global South, helping to spawn racist, fundamentalist, and xenophobic movements. These profound insights are increasingly relevant as we move into the 2020s.

The (Western) left in the imperialist center is at a historical moment.⁷⁰ Without reconnecting with the anti-imperialist tradition, and without a careful analysis of the imperialism developed in the neoliberal era, it is likely the left will retreat further from its revolutionary past in the next decade or two. Whether to follow the Second International, or the traditions of the late Marx, Lenin, and Mao, is a vital question for all of us.

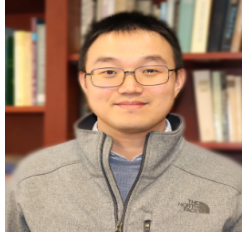
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⁷⁰ ↩ The socialists in the periphery and semiperiphery also face serious challenges, which deserve a separate discussion.

❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.

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