

Imperialism—the Final Stage of Capitalism

(Continuation)

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IN the first months of 1904 the steel syndicate of Germany was organized: in November 1904 the international rail combine was reorganized on the following basis: England 53.5%, Germany 28.83% and Belgium 17.67%. France joined the combine on a basis of 4.80, 5.80, and 6.4% of the profits above 100% for the first, second and third years, respectively. In 1905 the Steel Trust of America (the United States Steel Corporation) joined the combine and so did Austria and Spain.

"Now," wrote Vogelstein in 1910, "the division of the earth is completed, and the large consumers, especially the national railroad systems, can live like the poet on Jupiter's cloud, for in that division of the world their interests have not been taken into account." (70)

We may also mention the international zinc syndicate founded in 1909, which divided up the business among five groups of mills, German, Belgian, French, Spanish and English. Also the international powder trust which, to quote Liefmann, was "a close combine of all the explosive plants of Germany and which agreed with similar French and American factories for the production of dynamite to divide up the world, so to speak." (71)

Liefmann listed in 1897 some 40 international combines, including Germany, that number rising to 100 in 1910.

Some bourgeois writers have expressed the opinion that international combines, being one of the most striking features of the internationalization of capital, justify one in expecting peace among the nations under the capitalist system. Theoretically, such an idea is absurd: practically, it is a peace of sophistry and can be used to justify the lowest kind of opportunism.

International combines reveal the growth of capitalist monopolies and also what groups of capitalists are fighting for among themselves. The latter point is the most important, but it only throws light upon the historical and economic meaning of the past, for the fight may assume and does continually assume a shape, for various reasons, more or less local or temporary: but the essence of the fight itself, its class character, cannot change as long as class distinctions remain. Of course, it may be of interest to some bourgeois, let us say, the German bourgeoisie, to misrepresent the essential of the modern economic fight (for the division of the world) and to insist now on one detail, now on another detail of the fight. This is the mistake Kautsky makes. For after all, it is the German bourgeoisie which is under consideration, but the bourgeoisie of the entire world. Capitalists divide up the world, not out of any malicious intent, but simply because the degree of business concentration which we have reached compels them to resort to that device in order to make any profits.

And they divide it up according to "their capital," to their "power," for under a capitalist system of production, the division cannot be made upon any other basis. Power does not vary according to economic and political development; in order to understand the past one must know what questions are settled by variations of power, but whether those variations are purely economic or extra-economic (for instance due to wars) is after all a secondary question which cannot in any way change the essential aspects of the latest stage of Capitalism. To neglect the essentials of the fight and of the division of the world among capitalists in order to discuss the outward appearance of that fight and of that division (world wide one day, or restricted the next day, and then again world wide) is to dally with sophism. A glance at our modern Capitalism will show us that groups of capitalists reach certain agreements among themselves on the basis of an economic division of the world, but that concurrently, and in connection with them, political groups, or governments reach certain agreements on the basis of a territorial division of the world, of a struggle for colonies, for exclusive territories.

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The Division of the World Among the Great Powers.

The geographer, A. Supan, in his book on *The Territorial Development of European Colonies* (75) gives us in a condensed form a clear idea of that development at the end of the 19th century.

Area occupied by colonies of the various European Powers and of the United States:

	1876	1900	Gain	Loss
In Africa	10.8%	90.4	79.6	
In Africa	10.8%	90.4	79.6	
Polynesia	56.8	98.9	42.1	
Asia	51.5	56.5	5.1	
Australia	100	100	—	
America	27.5	27.2		0.3

"The most noticeable fact of that period," the author says in his conclusion, "is the division of Africa and Polynesia."

As there are no unoccupied lands, that is, no lands belonging to no power in particular, in Asia and in America, we might go farther than Supan and say that the most noteworthy fact of the period in question is that the division of the world is complete, not in the sense that a redistribution of territories is henceforth impossible, (on the contrary that redistribution is possible and inevitable) but in the sense that the colonial policy of the capitalist nations has attained its object, which was to take possession of all the unoccupied lands on the planet.

The world has been divided up, and what is coming now is a redistribution of lands, that is, the passage of land from one domination under another, not from independence into dependence.

We are living through a peculiar era of world-wide colonial expansion which is intimately related to the latest phase in the development of Capitalism, with finance capital. We must therefore dwell at length upon concrete facts which will enable us not only to show wherein this era differs from the one preceding it, but also to visualize clearly the actual state of affairs at the present day.

And first of all we must answer two definite questions:

Do we notice a keener struggle for colonies in our epoch of finance capital? How is the world divided up at the present time, from the point of view of colonies?

An American writer, Morris, in his book on the history of colonization, gives us an idea of the growth of the colonial empires of England, France and Germany in the course of the 19th century.

Here are, in condensed form, the figures he arrives at:

	England		France		Germany	
	Area	Population	Area	Population	Area	Population
Years	millions	miles	millions	miles	millions	miles
1815-30	?	126.4	0.02	0.5		
1860	2.5	145.1	0.2	3.4		
1880	7.7	267.9	0.7	7.5		
1899	9.3	309.0	3.7	56.4	1.0	14.7

It was between 1860 and 1880 and, significantly enough, in the last twenty years of the 19th century also, that England entered her greatest period of colonial conquests, while France and Germany secured most of their colonial possessions between 1880 and 1900.

We have seen in a preceding chapter that the pre-monopolistic era in the development of Capitalism, that is Capitalism dominated by free competition, stretched from 1860 to 1870.

We now see that that era preceded an enormous "rise" in colonial acquisitions, a more and more bitter struggle for the territorial division of the world. It is evident therefore that the transition from monopolistic capital to finance-capital is bound to make the struggle for the division of the world more and more relentless.

Hobson, in his book on *Imperialism*, characterizes the period from 1884 to 1900 as a period of powerful expansion for the leading European powers. According to his estimates, England secured during that period 3.7 million square miles of land with a population of 57 million souls; France 3.6 million square miles with a population of 36 millions; Belgium, 900,000 square miles with a population of 20 millions; Portugal 800,000 square miles with 6 million people. The hunt for colonies at the end of the 19th century, especially in the eighties, on the part of all the capitalist nations, constitutes a generally admitted fact in the history of diplomacy and foreign relations.

When free competition was especially flourishing in England, that is from 1840 to 1860, the bourgeois politicians who were in the saddle opposed any sort of a colonial policy, and considered that it would be necessary for England to grant her colonies their independence, to let them secede entirely.

M. Baer, in an article published in 1898 on the latest developments of English Imperialism, quotes the imperialistically-minded Disraeli as saying in 1852: "Colonies are just a millstone around our neck." At the end of the 19th century the men of the day in England were Cecil Rhodes and Joseph Chamberlain the prophets of Imperialism applying purely imperialistic policies with the greatest cynicism.

It is not without interest to notice that the connection between the purely economic and the social-political essentials of the newborn Imperialism was perfectly obvious to those leaders of the English bourgeoisie: Chamberlain stated that Imperialism was the only wise and economical policy, and pointed to the competition which England is now meeting with in the world market on the part of Germany, America, and Belgium. The salvation lies in monopolies, capitalists said, and they organized cartels, syndicates, trusts. Salvation lies in monopoly, the bourgeois leaders repeated, and they endeavored to annex parts of the world which had not as yet been seized by some nation. But Cecil Rhodes, as his intimate friend Stead tells us, offered in 1895 the following argument in favor of his imperialistic plans: "I was yesterday in the East End of London and witnessed a meeting of the unemployed. After listening to all the wild talk and cries for bread, bread, I went home, and reflected upon what I had seen and heard, and came to the conclusion that Imperialism was more imperative than ever. . . . Here is my solution for the social problem: if we are to save the forty million inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a murderous civil war, we, the colonialists, must secure new territories to be occupied by the growing population, where we can find new markets for the goods manufactured in our mills and factories. It is all a question of food supply. If you do not want a civil war you must become imperialistic." (74)

Thus spake in 1895 Cecil Rhodes, millionaire, financial magnate, more than any one else responsible for the Transvaal war.

To present a clearer picture of the territorial partition of the world and of the various changes having taken place in the distribution of colonial lands in the course of the last decade, we shall quote the figures given by Supan in his writings on the colonial possessions of all the nations. Supan's figures are for the years 1876 and 1900. We shall start with the year 1876 for it marks the end of the development of pre-monopolistic Capitalism and establish a comparison with the year 1914, giving for the latter year Huebner's figures taken from his Geographical-statistical Tables.

Supan only gives us the size and population of the colonies. To make the picture more complete, we intend to mention also the area and population of non-colonial or semi-colonial lands, such as Persia, China and Turkey: the first of those lands is almost entirely colonized, the second and third are gradually becoming so.

Colonial possessions of the great powers in millions of square Kilometres and millions of population.

	Colonies		Motherland		Total	
	1876	1914	1876	1914	1876	1914
	area	pop.	area	pop.	area	pop.
England	22.5	251.9	33.5	393.5	56.0	645.4
Russia	17.0	15.9	17.4	33.2	34.4	49.1
France	0.0	6.0	10.6	55.5	10.6	61.5
Germany		2.9	12.3	0.5	12.3	3.4
U. S. A.		0.3	9.7	0.4	9.7	0.7
Japan		0.3	19.2	0.4	19.2	0.7
Totals	40.4	273.8	65.0	523.4	105.4	797.2

Colonies of other nations (Belgium, Holland etc.)	9.0	45.3
Semi-colonial lands (Persia, China, Turkey)	11.5	361.2
Other nations	28.0	280.0

Entire world 139.9 1657.0

We see clearly that the division of the world was "completed" by the dawn of the 20th century. After 1876 colonial empires grew by gigantic steps and bounds, something like 150 per cent, through the annexation of between 40 and 65 million square kilometers; six great powers seized the equivalent of 150% of their own area, that is 16.5 million square kilometers.

In 1876 three powers had no colonies; and a third one, France, had hardly any. In 1914 those four powers had acquired a colonial empire of 14.1 million square kilometres, or approximately one and a half times greater than the area of Europe, with a population of some 100 million souls. The new colonial possessions were very unevenly divided. If we compare the colonies of France, Germany and Japan, three nations which do not differ greatly in area and population, we see that France acquired three times as much land as Germany and Japan put together.

From the point of view of finance-capital, France was probably at the beginning of the period under consideration several times wealthier than Germany and Japan combined.

(To be continued)