

Imperialism and the New Middle Class

By S. J. RUTGERS

The ever growing productivity of labor combined with a relatively constant standard of living of the workers, means an increasing volume of products in the hands of the Capitalist class. Personal squander by the individual capitalists cannot dispose of these values; in fact, unlimited luxury as displayed in some other periods of history is against the capitalist morals, the accumulation of capital being a fundamental condition for successful competition.

Therefore Capitalism has to expand, has to crush the remnants of other forms of production, has to increase its field of action, has to extend its markets.

Commercial capital strengthened by the robbery of Far Eastern countries, played an important part in the birth of European industrial capitalism and commercial Colonialism continued to play an important part in the turbulent life of this new giant. But at the same time this colonialism fundamentally changed its character. Instead of robbing the wealth of nature in foreign countries and killing the people, the process reversed into robbing the people and killing nature. A period in which the valuable products of tropical regions were "traded" against a worthless piece of mirror or a bottle of the poorest gin, bribing the native chiefs and taking by force whatever was not given up voluntarily was followed by a period of more regular "exchange."

The European industry commenced to dump its cheap products, especially those of the textile industry into the colonies and insisted upon having the natives produce chiefly those products which are of special interest to western "civilization." This not only resulted in greatly destroying the picturesque landscapes by substituting monotonous plantations for a multitude of inland fields and gardens and cheap cotton clothes for the charming products of skillful home industry, but it meant a new form of slavery as well. The introduction of money as a regular feature of economic life, forced upon the native population, if necessary,

by the levying of taxes, resulted in a greater amount of misery, exploitation and starvation than in the worst periods of direct colonial plunder. This was the era of free trade in which interference with the local affairs of the colonies was generally restricted to dealings with the native chiefs and adequate protection of commerce, especially in ports and big centers of traffic. This was also the era of starvation in British and other colonies.

Again the character of colonial exploitation had to change. The increasing outpour of commodities into undeveloped countries combined with primitive methods of exploitation of the natives reached a point where these commodities got a soul, became active life organizations, became *capital* ready to aggressively exploit native labor, coin native blood into gold.

This change came with a change in the character of the commodities exported from Europe.

The production of commodities for consumption in the old capitalist countries soon reached a point of more or less permanent overproduction. Unnecessary to state that at the same time millions were starving none the less for want of all the necessities of life. But production for profit merely considers wants that can be paid for and the workers get only a small part of what they make. Selling to those occupied in more primitive forms of production; agricultural States in Europe or colonies abroad means exchange for foodstuffs or basic materials for production. Foreign products may help to stimulate luxury and complexity of life and foreign and native primitive people can be educated by missionaries and contact with "civilized" life to use more products of modern industry but the limits are rather narrow. For it would be an absurdity for capital to educate the natives in the colonies and the peasants at home to such a degree of luxury that they could buy largely the good things of life, which would mean higher wages and less profits.

Japan, i. e., the latest achievement of capitalism, did not develop its home market in any extensive way for fear that the low