

Neo-Colonialism and the Changing Nature of Imperialism in Africa

Higher concentrations of wealth and growing class divisions represent the decline of world capitalism

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Note: This paper was presented at the Left Forum held at John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York during May 30-June 1, 2014. The panel hosted by the International League of People's Struggle (ILPS) was entitled "The Economics of Imperialism in the 21st Century" and was chaired by Gary Labao of the New York Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines. In addition to Abayomi Azikiwe, the panel also featured Bernadette Elorin, the chairperson of BAYAN USA, Berta Joubert-Ceci of the Women's International Democratic Federation and Bill Doares, Vice-Chair of the International League of People's Struggle, U.S. chapter.

V.I. Lenin provided the most comprehensive as well as succinct definition of imperialism in his famous book, *"Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism"* that was published during World War I. In this book Lenin deals with changing character of imperialism and the supremacy of international finance capital as the dominant interests within the world capitalist system.

After nearly a century, Lenin's study of the changing economic character of world capitalism remains important in understanding the nature of international relations and the class character of modern society. Wealth has become even more concentrated during the first two decades of the 21st century despite monumental strides in the areas of technological development and industrial productivity.

Lenin said in Chapter VII of this above-mentioned work that

"If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism. Such a definition would include what is most important, for, on the one hand, finance capital is the bank capital of a few very big monopolist banks, merged with the capital of the monopolist associations of industrialists; and, on the other hand, the division of the world is the transition from a colonial policy which has extended without hindrance to territories unseized by any capitalist power, to a colonial policy of monopolist possession of the territory of the world, which has been completely divided up."

The two World Wars fought during the first half of the 20th century were designed to carve up the spoils of colonial conquest and exploitation. Nonetheless, these wars could not

resolve the quest for hegemony by the imperialist states, of course, due to the intervention of the masses of workers and peasants who rose up during the aftermath of these conflagrations.

Imperialism and Neo-Colonialism

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, a leader in the Gold Coast Revolution (later Ghana) and a proponent of Pan-Africanism and Socialism, later identified neo-colonialism as the final phase of imperialism in a book he published in 1965 entitled "Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism" issued on the eve of his removal from power by a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) engineered coup in Feb. 1966. The colonial and semi-colonial powers may relinquish the appearance of control through the recognition of independent states and their governments, yet they maintain their quest for hegemony through the control of the international division of labor and the dominance over the economic relations of production, ownership and trade.

Nkrumah wrote in the chapter entitled "The Mechanisms of Neo-Colonialism," that

"Faced with the militant peoples of the ex-colonial territories in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, imperialism simply switches tactics. Without a qualm it dispenses with its flags, and even with certain of its more hated expatriate officials. This means, so it claims, that it is 'giving' independence to its former subjects, to be followed by 'aid' for their development. Under cover of such phrases, however, it devises innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism. It is this sum total of these modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about 'freedom', which has come to be known as neo-colonialism."

In the following paragraph, Nkrumah then goes on to identify the principal enemy of the forces of national liberation, anti-imperialism and socialism throughout the world. He notes that

"Foremost among the neo-colonialists is the United States, which has long exercised its power in Latin America. Fumblingly at first she turned towards Europe, and then with more certainty after world war two when most countries of that continent were indebted to her. Since then, with methodical thoroughness and touching attention to detail, the Pentagon set about consolidating its ascendancy, evidence of which can be seen all around the world."

These words still carry resonance in the second decade of the 21st century. The motivations behind imperialist militarism are based upon their attempts to maintain control of the economic resources of the world.

In relationship to the situation in Africa today there appears to be a counter-narrative related to the reports of phenomenal economic growth while at the same time the ominous threat of "global terrorism" provides a rationale for deepening military and intelligence interventions. Although the U.S. is leading in this approach, other imperialist states such as France, Britain, Canada and Germany are also heavily involved.

The formation of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) signaled a renewed threat to

the sovereignty of the continent. In this current phase of post-colonial history, the Pentagon, the CIA and NATO forces along with the State of Israel are involved in numerous African states.

Under the guise of providing emerging African states with assistance in enhancing their internal security apparatuses to guard against “terrorism,” the African Union member-states are becoming less stable and incapable of resolving their own internal problems. This contradiction also has served to undermine the tenuous existence of African unity as demonstrated in the EU-Africa summit held in Brussels, Belgium.

The Domestic Character of Neo-Colonialism

When the character of imperialism is analyzed it cannot be merely limited to foreign policy concerns of the Western capitalist states. Within the domestic confines of these countries there are oppressed nations that have been subjected to domination and super-exploitation.

In the U.S., the growing populations of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Middle Eastern communities, etc., are creating the conditions for major shifts in the political culture of the country. Consequently, a renewed series of attacks are being carried out against these populations under the rubric of privatization aimed at capitalist re-structuring.

For example in Detroit, the banks have driven nearly a quarter-of-a-million people, mainly African Americans, from the city over the last decade-and-a-half. This assault on the population was carried out utilizing economic means such as home foreclosures and predatory municipal lending engineered by the financial institutions.

The imposed emergency management and forced bankruptcy of Detroit, the largest per capita African American populated municipality in the U.S., was carried out not by the people who live in the city but by racist right-wing governor utilizing a dictator who works as an agent of the banks.

This is why we raised the slogan “Cancel the Debt.” We realize that the current situation was created by the criminal actions of international finance capital carried out on a domestic level.

These attacks against the people of Detroit and other municipalities in Michigan, most of whom have majority African American populations, are also designed to set a precedence for the nationwide seizure of public pension funds, public assets, the privatization of schools, the driving down of wages and the theft of any semblance of even bourgeois democratic practice and norms. This is why the most advanced forces in Detroit have reached out to nationally oppressed and working class communities throughout the U.S. and indeed the world.

The struggle in Detroit and other municipalities throughout the country is part and parcel of a world struggle against imperialism. Consequently, despite the increasing impoverishment and repression of the majority of the world’s population, which is well under way, this current phase provides the basis for the building of greater solidarity efforts which in the end will prevail over the ever-shrinking ruling class that remains mired in perpetual crises necessitating even more wars and greater degrees of economic exploitation.

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