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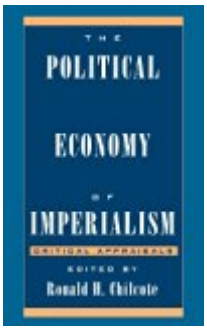
Ronald H. Chilcote, ed.. *The Political Economy of Imperialism: Critical Appraisals.* Lanham and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. viii + 261 pp. $28.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7425-1010-4.



Reviewed by Leland Barrows

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Globalization--The Highest Level of Imperialism

For those of us who feel increasing unease at the apparently unstoppable forward march of globalization and the triumphalist discourse of its advocates, this book, a collection of essays on the political economy of imperialism, approximates the role of the proverbial little boy who recognizes that the emperor is indeed naked. It consists of ten essays by well-known political scientists and economists who have devoted much of their careers to the study of imperialism and (capitalist) economic development, and who are currently discovering and chronicling the continuities of both as they emerge as the new exploitative synthesis--globalization. The essays are preceded by an analytic introduction by editor and author Ronald Chilcote.

Chilcote's inspiration to compile and publish this volume was a graduate seminar on the political economy of imperialism that he has been teaching at the University of California at Riverside since 1990, one that has given rise to other publications that this volume complements.[1] It is not the publication of the proceedings of a conference, even though it has that format; rather, it most approximates a published set of course readings.

This volume, as Chilcote states, has as its point of departure the "fundamental premise that capitalism in its evolving and consolidated forms underlies questions and theories of imperialism and development" (p. 1). It assumes that the basis for a coherent theory of imperialism and development can be traced back to such classical writers on political economy as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and, of course, Karl Marx. Although some of the authors claim that the diffusion of capitalism throughout the world had positive, and not simply negative, effects, the negative view predominates along with the very strong suggestion that globalization is the highest stage of imperialism. Indeed, the distribution of the essays stresses the latter point, for they are placed, consecutively, under the following headings: "Imperialism: Its Legacy and Contemporary Significance," "Imperialism and Development," and "Globalism or Imperialism?"

The intention of the first section is to trace the origins, development, and consequences of classical imperialism, a task that is accomplished by the first three essays in the group, particularly the third one. The fourth essay is more narrowly focused than the others, assessing (very positively) the relevance of J. A. Hobson's ***Imperialism: A Study*** (1902), both when originally published and today. The four essays are written, respectively, by M. C. Howard and J. E. King, specialists in Marxian economics; Michael Barratt Brown, a historian and critic of development policies, who is also Director of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation; Anthony Brewer, an economic historian, who specializes in Marxian theories of imperialism; and Gregory P. Nowell, a political scientist. In different ways, the authors attempt to situate imperialism as a concept and as an historical phenomenon, asking themselves what brought it about, who were its protagonists, and what were its effects on both the countries that perpetrated it and on those that experienced it. The authors also ask whether or not the concept still has validity today, given that the results of traditional imperialism--colonies--are now all independent nation-states; barring a few minor exceptions, almost all are integral and constitutionally defined parts of their respective metropoles.[2]. For the four authors, the motor of imperialism is primarily economic.

Conforming to Chilcote's logic, the second section of the volume, "Imperialism and Development," is clearly intended as a critique of post-1945 development theory. The suggestion made is that since capitalist-inspired imperialism led to increased economic disparities throughout the world and that colonialism "underdeveloped" the world (to borrow a 1974 insight from Walter Rodney), there is little hope that capitalist development policies and projects can redress the situation.

Can socialist development theory offer a better outcome? The question is partially answered in the affirmative by the essays making up this section. These have been written by John Willoughby, an economist, who specializes in Marxian theories of imperialism and the political economy of capitalist competition; J. M. Blaut, a specialist in the historical geography of the Third World; and Ronaldo Munck, a sociologist who has specialized in dependence theory. Their essays reflect a reaction to, if not inspiration from, the position taken by Marx himself and other Marxian socialists, including the pre-revolutionary Lenin (a position that troubles many present-day Marxists). This position states that nineteenth-century European imperialism, directed at the Third World (particularly India undergoing British conquest and consolidation), was largely a progressive force, for it served to break down the perceived immobility of feudal and pre-capitalist modes of production and to force the societies in question into the capitalist world economy, whereby they would be forcibly modernized and better prepared for transition to socialism.[3]

In particular, the essay by Willoughby gives a fascinating introduction to theories of socialist development with particular reference to the ideas of Vladimir Lenin, Evgeni Preobrazhensky, and Nikolai Bukharin as well as to economic practice in the early years of the Soviet Union. The star of Willoughby's show is Preobrazhensky, whom he considers to have been "the first socialist economist to attempt to develop a theory of socialist development" (p. 119), followed by Bukharin, both of whom played major roles in the New Economic Policy (NEP) instituted by Lenin in 1921 in the Soviet Union and operative until December 1927.

The problem was to placate the peasantry so that they would feed the urban workers, such that, together, they would willingly strengthen the proletarian state through socialist industrialization. The contradictions between rural and urban, and between the market elements of NEP and political dirigisme, if not outright coercion, were never solved. The experiment ended with the ascendancy of Stalin's despotism, five-year plans for

socialist industrialization, forcible collectivization for agriculture, and the execution of both Preobrazhensky and Bukharin.

Still, as Willoughby shows, these early socialist theoreticians faced many of the same problems that confronted development economists after the Second World War, in particular: the extent to which the state should "plan development in order to overcome the short time horizon enforced by capitalist competition"; the extent to which "integration into the world economy dooms peripheral economies to become permanent semi-colonies of industrialized Western states"; "the appropriate mix between heavy and light industrial investment"; and the extent to which the state should "turn the terms of trade against the rural sector in order to stimulate industry" (p. 123). These problems are still of concern to the developing nations and are not being solved by unrestrained economic neo-liberalism.

Munck's lament regarding the "crippling political effect of the idea that there is no alternative to globalization" (p. 147), in his essay closing the second section, leads pertinently to the third and final section of the book, "Globalism or Imperialism?" Its three essays view globalization squarely as the highest stage of imperialism, or "detached imperialism," as James Petras, the final author, says (p. 186). The three essays argue, from different vantage points, that the term "globalization" has simply become a politically correct label for imperialism and colonialism; both have been perfected and reduced to their economic essentials so as to serve as a more effective cover for economic exploitation, the concentration of capital, and increasingly unequal relations between the countries of the center and those of the periphery, but also between capital and labor in the countries of the center. The processes of globalization are leading to the pauperization of increasing numbers of working- and middle-class citizens and residents of those developed countries in which the levers of globalization are situated.

The authors contributing to section 3 include Samir Amin, a specialist on Third World development, currently the Director of the Third World Forum in Dakar, Senegal; Prabhat Patniak, an economist who teaches at the Centre of Economic Studies and Planning at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India; and James Petras, a sociologist with expertise in the social effects of neo-liberalism. The three authors describe an ideological sanitization of the sorts of economic exploitation that were stock-in-trade in the older situations of classical imperialism and colonialism, and that provide cover in developing and also developed countries (including the former socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe) for such phenomena as the privatization of state resources, the outsourcing and delocalization of economic activities, regressive taxation, and, in general, the destruction of the welfare state.

Since the whole superstructure of classical colonialism has disappeared, there is no foreign ruling power, in the developing countries, to blame directly for one's poverty, poor economic performance, and unfair terms of trade. The possible exceptions are the so-called Bretton Woods institutions: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the World Trade Organization and the multinational corporations that gain sustenance and legitimacy from the writs of these bodies. In the developed countries, the excuse for dismantling the welfare state is simply that it is "too expensive," that "there is no free lunch," or that middle-class subsidies, like free tuition in European universities, are unfair (never mind that the unfairness comes from the regressive taxation that finances free tuition). No further explanation is needed or given. In the same way, the Bretton Woods organizations and multinational corporations operate according to impersonal economic criteria which appear to be impervious to all challenges. Those countries, even relatively powerful ones like Argentina, that do attempt a challenge, are so marginalized as to become irrelevant. Munck, who is originally from

Argentina, evokes the sad paradox, "If there is one thing worse than exploitation it is not being exploited at all" (p. 149).

Certainly the message that this book attempts to deliver is valuable and timely. It explains the shift from old-fashioned imperialism and colonialism to globalization, namely borderless imperialism. But will the message be transmitted to a wide readership? Will it enlighten and change minds on a wide scale? This reviewer thinks not. He believes that this volume will be read only within a small circle of convinced believers, if at all. One reason for this pessimistic verdict is that the essays themselves are highly specialized and, for the most part, not user-friendly for the general reader. Only Brewer's essay gives an overview of the course and consequences of imperialism that is easy to read and serves as a very good introduction to the whole problem. But it comes fourth in the volume, after the editor's introduction and two preceding essays.

The secret (one to which Chilcote was apparently not party) to producing a good compiled volume is, of course, the selection, editing, and placing of the successive essays or chapters. The key to the success of such a volume as a unified whole is the introductory essay. It must present the component essays, explain and interpret them, and justify a basis of continuity that will be confirmed by a reading of the essays themselves. In such a venture, Chilcote has come very close to failure. His introduction, that purports to synthesize the transition from imperialism to globalization, is confusing, particularly as a means to introduce the essays that follow and their authors. In dealing with the first section, he fails to introduce the authors in the order of presentation of their essays. He begins his presentation of the second section with an evocation of Brewer, whose essay was the third in the first section and then jumps to Patnaik, whose essay is the second one in the third section. Chilcote's jumping about and evocation and discussion of authors other than those presented in the volume may reflect sound internal logic (and certainly demonstrate a great deal of erudition on his part); however, he has failed to introduce the specific authors and essays making up the present volume in a way that is pedagogically sound.

In concluding, the reviewer feels grateful that the U.S. Constitution guarantees a free press. This volume and the criticisms of the accepted order that it embodies can be published and freely read. But who is going to read this book, and what impact can it possibly have? Sadly, globalization has the last word.

Notes

[1]. Particularly ***Imperialism: Theoretical Directions*** (Amherst: Humanity Press, 2000); and the chapter, "Theories of Imperialism", in ***Theories of Comparative Political Economy***, ed. Ronald Chilcote (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

[2]. According to J. M. Blaut (p. 140, n. 6), Puerto Rico is the most important remaining "classical colony"--an odd claim given that the Puerto Rican people are U.S. citizens and that they themselves freely chose their "commonwealth" status by plebiscite in 1952. At any time, they can opt for statehood (like Hawaii) or for full national independence.

[3]. The embarrassment caused by Marx's pro-imperialist and pro-colonial views is plain to see in the following: Rene Gallissot and Gilbert Badia, eds., ***Marx, Marxisme et l'Algerie: textes de Marx-Engels*** (Paris: Union Generale des Editions, 1976). The intention of the two editors was to present a series of texts by Marx and Engels illustrating their total opposition to the French conquest of Algeria. However, more than half of the book consists of elaborate and painful efforts by the editors to explain that Marx and Engels really did not mean what they had clearly stated.

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