Wildcat, Richard Tate, Fabian Tompsett
The Bosses Have No Country
Marxists and the So-Called Problem of Imperialism
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with some spelling fixes and formatting changes, mostly to the footnotes.
This text was written by a Wildcat member for a conference held in London in 1988. It was criticised quite heavily, not least by other Wildcat members, in particular for its attacks on Marx's method.
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Marxists and the So-Called Problem of Imperialism

Wildcat, Richard Tate, Fabian Tompsett

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In China, the cultural revolution meant that millions of youth and women were set to work to accomplish this primitive accumulation. This is internal colonialism or fascism. Bourgeois rights are put aside in favour of naked accumulation. The wages system is put on the back-burner as unwaged slavery takes over. Anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism, anti-sexism and all sorts of other antis take phenomena of capital and oppose them. These phenomena are real, but by struggling against a partial aspect these ideologies end up propping capitalism up. Thus Sivanandan is correct when he rejects 'anti-racist ideology', but this is not to deny that there is an anti-racist struggle, or anti-imperialist struggle etc. Because to really fight capitalism this can only be done by fighting its phenomena, as it only exists as a series of phenomena. To fight it as an abstraction of simply international capital vs international labour is idealist. All practical struggles are limited until they can unify themselves as global revolution. But unless the resistance starts at such a level there will be nothing to come together except ideas rattling together in the empty heads of intellectuals.

Thus when we participate in a practical struggle we are always looking for ways to generalise it, to shed ideologies which keep the struggle confined to the initial matter. But to generalise it in a concrete way. The struggle against imperialism must not be an anti-imperialist struggle — the example of Germany is good. We must struggle against all the phenomena of capital, though individual proletarians will find themselves active in particular areas depending on what life throws at them. Leftists will try to trap them in those areas, with all manner of non-sense. Communists do not. They draw the struggles together. This can hardly be done by dismissing every practical struggle as simply based on a phenomena, and only offering struggle *in the abstract, against capital in the abstract.* That role is best left to middle-class intellectuals who are pretty much irrelevant anyway.

FT

Introduction

This essay suffers from the usual problems caused by Wildcat's lack of resources. There are some missing components, and it needs some editing. In spite of these, it is an important contribution to the necessary theoretical work of the communist movement. It was originally intended as a discussion of the problem of imperialism. However as the essay explains, in the course of writing it I became convinced that imperialism is a red herring. Instead it discusses the real issue, Nations and Nationalism. In passing it glosses over other important issues such as decadence and the Marxist Method. The purpose of this essay and the meeting it was written for is to contribute to a discussion about an international Platform to form the theoretical basis of a regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of assisting the centralisation of the international class struggle.

Marx and Engels

Marx and Engels had little to say on the subject of imperialism. Their remarks on colonialism and foreign trade, particularly the section on counter-tendencies to the tendency of the falling rate of profit, in *Capital 3*[1] have been well explained by their epigones, and used to give authority to their own investigations. Their 20th century successors have been in a better position to shed light on the developments which led to August 1914, so I concentrate on them in the next section. More significant are Marx and Engel's views on Method, which underlie much subsequent work. The errors of Lenin, for example, cannot always be conveniently explained away as a departure from the Method of Marx. We don't want to get Marx off the hook. Before calling ourselves "Marxists" we need to work out how much of Marx and Engels' method or methods we should adopt. In *The German Ideology* (1846) Marx polemicised against his

[1] *Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence.* CWO London 1985. p. 15.

Hegelian classmates and outlined the materialist conception of history. "The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way".[2]

But Marx's ideas are often very difficult if not impossible to verify in this way. Take the following extracts from the *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy*. "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of the development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. … new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve".[3] See also Engels, *The Dialectics of Nature*.

In 1846, Marx seemed to be breaking with Hegelian ideology. But throughout the rest of his work, the ghost of dialectics seemed to keep whispering in his ear. It is unfortunate that Marx died before the philosophical routing of Hegel which took place in England at the beginning of the 20th Century. The above passage from the *Preface* shows well the elegant seductiveness of dialectical thought. We should be as wary of it as we are of modern physicists who claim their theories must be true because they are elegant. Look where dialectical reasoning led Marx. The statement that mankind only sets itself such problems as it can solve is patently false. The problem of travelling to distant galaxies in a short time

[2] *Selected Writings*. Karl Marx. ed. D. McLellan, OUP 1977. p. 160.
[3] *Selected Writings*. Karl Marx. ed. D. McLellan, OUP 1977. pp. 389–390

capital is static, i.e. bound to the state (concerned with organising reproduction).

International Capital does not simply consist of finance capital, as this is dependent on productive capital, which is in turn dependent on reproductive capital. International Capital is the inter-relation of all three. Depending on local and ultimately global circumstance, different capitals get an edge. The conflicts which emerge amongst the capitalists are not games of cricket. So in the Albanian Central committee of the ruling class, faction fights are fought out with gunfights. In Britain, things are more discrete such as the so-called suicide of Eric Miller. The ruling class deal with problems at a variety of levels on a daily basis. Thus a diplomat might sort out an inter-state question in the morning, plot boardroom manouvers in the afternoon, and spend the evening fretting over family matters. Meanwhile a proletarian may spend the morning visiting the authorities to make sure that their papers are in order, having had to emigrate due to the suction of surplus value from their native land, which has carried them in its wake. In the afternoon they have to deal with a boss which is not convinced of the necessity of taking the morning off, whilst in the evening they have to sort out how the family is going to manage with a half-day pay cut that week. And imperialism doesn't exist?

Imperialism exists in that surplus value is moved across state boundaries which make different zones of the reproduction of capitalist life. (It even affects local government boundaries, although in Britain this is to be reformed by the poll tax legislation.) By this process, stronger nation states become even stronger, and the weaker even weaker. Thus capitalist development exaggerates global differences. It is only where a state has been able to develop a process of primitive accumulation (such as the exploitaion of Siberia by the USSR in the thirties), that a state has been able to upgrade itself — i.e. at the direct expense of the proletariat. And this process can only happen in certain conditions — in this case the depression.

tic love when it comes to the proles. The ability of the bourgeoisie to mobilise the workers behind a nationalist war, is dependent on their ability to present the war as the defence of the family — not the family in abstract, but that the worker must participate in the war to defend their own nearest and dearest — to prevent their mother, wife or daughter being raped. More recently women have been mobilised, aside from playing a role in militarised medical services and replacing men in the factories. But this is always more contentious as it raises the threat of dissolving the family and military discipline as the possibility of sexual encounters amongst front line troops breaks both the repressed homo-eroticism of most fighting forces, and weakens allegiance to family life (even if this exists in name only). The interweaving of sexism (including heterosexism), nationalism, racism and militarism find their nexus in the fabric of the family.

International Capital

International Capital lies at the other end of the spectrum from the immediacy and intimacy of the family. The former exists as an abstraction — a very real abstraction, while the latter is often passed over as being natural despite its artificialness. International capital, or capital in totum, or capital precisely as an abstraction, is a metaphysical entity which is realised through capitalist relations. It is everywhere and nowhere, which is continually materialised through the practice of the capitalist process. It does not operate through conspiracy, although it incorporates conspiracy. It is the operation of mutual interest between the owners of capital in relation to those who don't own capital. It is the domination of small capital by big capital. While much capital is fluid as finance capital (concerned with locating good profit rates), other capital such as industrial capital is more tied to particular structures i.e. specific industries (concerned with organising production). Yet more

has been set, but cannot be solved. And there is no empirical evidence for the view that history proceeds according to a pattern of forms and fetters. "Relations" and "forces" of production are arbitrary abstract categories. As we see in the subsequent section, dialectical thought helped lead Marx's disciples astray.

… And Their Followers.

The more radical elements within the Second International had good organisational and political reasons to see themselves as the successors of Marx and Engels. Around the turn of the century, various debates took place among these radical social democrats about imperialism and nationalism. The most famous of these is Lenin. This is a pity. Lenin argued that imperialism was in part a conscious strategy to buy off the working classes in the Imperialist countries. His evidence is one quote from Cecil Rhodes.[4] From Rhodes's opinion that imperialism would help avoid revolution in Britain, Lenin derived his theory of the Labour Aristocracy, which shows his moralism at its crudest. But he also quotes Engels to the effect that the workers of England "merrily share the feast" of England's colonies. He condemns the "economic parasitism" by means of which the English ruling class "bribe the lower classes into acquiescence". What infantile, petit-bourgeois rubbish! The ruling class in all countries pay workers as much as they think they have to, calculated from (a) the need for workers to stay alive and, to a greater or lesser extent, healthy, (b) the shortage or otherwise of workers capable of doing the job, and (c) the class struggle. Where does a wage rise gained by struggle end and a bribe begin? How can British workers deduce what proportion of their wage packets are the proceeds of the exploitation of the colonies, and should they hand that proportion back to their employers, declaring their refusal to be bribed? In reality, if you accept the idea of dividing the

[4] *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism.* V.I. Lenin. Peking 1973. p. 93.

working class up into more or less exploited sections, it is not necessarily true that "As far as capital invested in the colonies, etc. is concerned, however, the reason why this can yield higher rates of profit is that the profit rate is generally higher there on account of the lower degree of development, and so too is the exploitation of labour, through the use of slaves and coolies, etc.".[5]

In reality, workers in the "advanced" countries often produce more profit as a proportion of their wages than those in "backward" countries. Lenin bases his views on off-hand remarks by Marx and Engels and ignores the better worked-out passages which can be used to develop an analysis of the world economy without the concept of imperialism (see for example[6]). We need waste no more time on Lenin.

Bukharin is more difficult. Though he supports Lenin's theory of the Labour Aristocracy, he does have a deeper understanding of the more serious aspects of Marx's ideas. In fact he has a dialectical approach, claiming to see a contradiction between nation states and international capitalism.[7]

Capitalism has created the world economy, the basis of communism, but "national economies" and "state capitalist trusts" contradict this, leading to imperialism and war. *Imperialism* was written in 1915, and his desire to show that imperialism is inevitable is obviously the result of the war, and his rejection of the possibility of a reformist solution to it. The reason he has to show a dialectical contradiction between nations and the world economy is in order to reject the theory of ultra-imperialism, which held that capitalism could gradually evolve into One Big Company, abolishing war. But his rejection is clumsy. "The development of world capitalism leads, on the one hand, to an internationalisation of economic life, and, on the other, to the levelling of economic differences, –

[5] *Capital, Volume 3*. Karl Marx. Penguin Books 1981. p. 345.
[6] *Development and Underdevelopment*. G. Kay. MacMillan 1975.
[7] *Imperialism and World Economy*. N. Bukharin. Merlin, London 1976.

affected by mass migration, we are dealing more with a socialised Russian culture.

None of these are nation-states. Britain is a conglomeration of nations, as is Indonesia. Pakistan is a result of the communal partition of the Indian sub-continent whereby mass migration was necessary as large numbers of non-muslims fled, to be replaced by muslims from 'India' who immigrated. The USA is continually struggling to become a nation, and the USSR is struggling to avoid becoming a series of separate nation states. Nationalism is a political programme which aims at the creation of a nation state, using certain perceived characteristics as the basis for the dissolution of inter-class tension.

The ideology of nationalism is that as 'we' all have certain characteristics in common, we should stick together. It has at its base the family. Nationalism always reinforces the family, because it is only through the family, and analogies based on the family that it can gain the sense of naturalness which is essential for it. Gaddhafi has explained this in his green book; family — tribe — nation. The family is the sacred altar of the nation. It is essential to the notion of nation. The family is the principal unit of reproduction, both in terms of reproducing human beings, but also reproducing culture and social relations — and reproducing property rights, which are generally inherited through the family. Also the family reproduces duties and obligations which pre-date capitalism.

Thus in Roumania we see the state run as a family business, while in the USSR previous nepotism has been exposed as new clans come to power. The family may be structured patriarchially or fraternally, and more often is the site of a conflict between the two, as rising generations take over from their fathers. The role of women may be prominent but never predominant. The family reproduces itself through the arrangement of marriages. All marriages are arranged, whether by family elders or market conditions. The bourgeoisie naturally champion the free market, which they are able to dominate. But they mask this behind notions of roman-

states (where the bourgeoisie have to unite in one party to survive). The tendency towards democracy is like the tendency towards a falling rate of profit — a veritable tendency which is not necessarily realised.

The capitalist development of the state grew out of pre-existing conditions. In some places (eg: Britain), the growth of capitalism was indigenous (though this is not to deny that it was part of a European movement). The state is rooted in pre-capitalist institutions which is why such profoundly anti-democratic phenomenon as the monarchy still exist, and are still important to the particular state. This is not to say that the monarchy is a strict necessity for the state, but that it is a contingent necessity. The bourgeoisie cannot simply toss it aside as an outmoded shell. The monarchy is the unifying factor of the different branches of the state. As such it makes itself essential to stable continuity. The bourgeoisie would toss it aside in a crisis, i.e. when that stable continuity no longer existed. In other places the state is a foreign import (eg the example of Indonesia). Here it is held together by a social layer that if not educated in the west, are deeply influenced by Euro-American culture. In yet other places (eg: Pakistan) there is an Islamic state. Here the principals of state-craft are derived from the Koran. Essentially this is a bodge, in that Mohammed had a concept of a universal state which would dominate the world as part and parcel of Islamic domination. The practice varies little from other states, but it does represent an attempt to merge an alien state with indigenous culture. Hence the anti-western ambience, which is riddled with contradictions absent in the other two examples. And finally there are the Modernist states (eg: the USA and USSR). Despite their differences, they share specifically bourgeois origins, based respectively on the concepts of Paine and Lenin. Naturally both are imperfect reproductions of ideological positions. In the USA, American nationalism has been based on the welding together of all sorts of ethnic groups to produce an anglicised American culture. In the Soviet Union, where the ethnic groups have been less

and, to an infinitely greater degree, the same process of economic development intensifies the tendency to "nationalise" capitalist interests, to form narrow "national" groups armed to the teeth and ready to hurl themselves at one another at any moment".[8] This is because, he says, state capitalism is the capitalism of existing, national states. Though the economy is increasingly international, "Acquisition, however, assumes the character of 'national' (state) acquisition where the beneficiaries are huge state companies of the bourgeoisie of finance capital".[9] Considering how central it is to his theory, he is obliged to explain what he means by "national", which he puts in inverted commas throughout the book. The reason he does so is clear from the footnote on p. 80 which is the only place he attempts to explain his crucial concept. "When we speak of 'national' capital, 'national' economy, we have in mind here as elsewhere, not the element of nationality in the strict sense of the word, but the territorial state conception of economic life." What is also clear is that he has only the haziest notion of what national capitals are. This undermines his theory rather seriously. Bukharin assumes that capital is divided into particular "narrow 'national' groups" when this is what he has to prove in order to refute ultra-imperialism. He underestimates capitalism's flexibility, its knack of continually revolutionising the productive forces. Is there any reason why single capitalist firms should be tied to one state? Is it impossible for capital to dissolve particular national states and replace them with larger entities, such as the European Community? Is there any limit to the size of such entities? Bukharin answers yes, but doesn't explain why.

Luxemburg's most important contribution to the debate on imperialism was her opposition to the idea that imperialism could be opposed by supporting national liberation movements. On the

[8] *Imperialism and World Economy*. N. Bukharin. Merlin, London 1976. pp. 106–107.

[9] *Imperialism and World Economy*. N. Bukharin. Merlin, London 1976. p. 106.

contrary, she argued, imperialism tends to make national liberation reactionary and impossible. Her empirical observations of the effects of Polish national liberation movements on the class struggle in the Russian Empire expose a chink in Marx's armour. In "Foreword to the Anthology" (1905) she argues against support for these movements.[10] She fearlessly attacked Marx for supporting Polish nationalism until his death, and accuses him of mechanically applying his own theory! If Marx can't use his own method correctly, what chance have we? She shows he was wrong by looking at the facts of Poland's integration into the Russian Empire, tending to unite the working class of Russia and Poland, and of how Polish nationalism acted against that unity during the revolution of 1905. Luxemburg rejects "eternal truths" like support for national liberation in favour of an empirical, case-by-case approach, and claims this is the Marxist method. So far from deducing that national liberation has always been anti-proletarian, she claims that there was a case for supporting certain liberation movements in the 19th century. Luxemburg's arguments were seriously debated at the time, and many social democrats, including a significant section of the Bolsheviks, supported her views against Lenin's "right of nations to self-determination". Eventually Lenin's views won the day, and the Communist International supported national liberation movements and thus the massacre of the proletariat in China, Germany, etc. etc.. The most obvious reason for Lenin's success was the power of the Soviet Union. Another reason for the weakness of opposition to Lenin's petit-bourgeois liberal position was the inability of his opponents to break from liberal democratic aspects of the Marxist tradition. Marxists, Marx and Engels included, have tended to argue that the bourgeoisie "betray" the ideals of their own revolution. At the other end of the scale, we are familiar with the beliefs of certain ex-members of Wildcat that the bourgeoisie aren't really democratic. Many of the weaknesses

[10] *The National Question.* R. Luxemburg. Monthly Review Press 1977. p. 95.

up with a call for the development of 'civilisation' in Africa i.e. the development of capitalist commodity relations.

From this stage, capitalism was committed to progress (I haven't discussed the impact of the French and American revolutions on this evolution, but they undoubtedly had a major affect). In South Africa, the criss-cross of Dutch and British capital, both operating through private capital, had developed a colony. In the colonies run by companies, the company was the state. When they recruited European labour, that labour was tied to the company for a set period (usually ten years) after which the settlers were free to move out of the company compound. In Australia, the British state acted the role of entrepreneur, using convicts to provide the primitive accumulation. Eventually during the nineteenth century the company colonies were 'nationalised' and became crown colonies allowing business to concentrate on production in specific areas. The state assumed the responsibility of ensuring preconditions for production — which takes on to the next point of discussion.

The State

It is important to clearly state what the function of the capitalist state is. It is the reproduction of the pre-conditions of capitalist society. This is done in a material way — i.e the state might use abstract concepts — in fact it must use abstract concepts — but it must confront the practical conditions which it finds. Thus it twists and turns according to the problems it confronts. Thus the preference of the bourgeoisie for democracy, as this leaves greatest room for maneuver, whilst at the same time maintaining permanent institutions which are not 'political'. The state can then change course with minimum disruption. In regions where the capitalist mode of production is weak, the bourgeoisie are unable to install democratic regimes and have to deal with military regimes or 'one-party'

into its own and made major reforms. They were frightened by the severity of the Gordon Riots of 1780, where the London proletariat emerged as a force in its own right, and equally frightened by the republican movements in the America and France. Several things happened. The WIMP was set up to police the docks, moving from a situation where they had to muster the militia to deal with labour unrest. This made the bourgeoisie less dependent on the good will of the petit-bourgeoisie. They built new docks surrounded by high brick walls (West India dock — 1800). They developed the wages system, extending the circulation of cash amongst the proletariat. This kept the petit-bourgeoisie quiet, as the cash now circulated through their hands before eventually returning to the coffers of the bourgeoisie. The 'anti-slavery' lobby i.e. the anti chattel slavery lobby grew in power, seeing chattel slavery as a fetter not merely literally on the arms and legs of the slaves, but also on the productive forces in an abstract sense. Liberals such as Wilberforce were by no means lovers of freedom, unless it was the freedom of the bosses, as he himself distinguished himself in the struggle against the major working class turmoil which emerged during this period.

Firstly, the slave trade was abolished. Looking at two texts of the time gives us an insight into this. On the one hand there is Mungo Park's account of his trips to West Africa, carried out under the auspices of the West African Company, primarily to conduct market survey's to check out the possibilities of developing commodity markets there. Another text, Equiano's 'Travels' is an account of an ex-slave who describes how he bought his freedom. Put to work on a boat which criss-crossed the Caribbean, making frequent visits to the American continent, he decided to try his luck as a 'commerce merchant'. From the meagre capital of threepence which he invested in a glass tumbler he eventually traded his way to the forty pounds necessary to buy his freedom (No doubt Thatcher would love this example of enterprise culture). The account of his travels — a popular anti-chattel slavery tract — end

of Luxemburg's positions derive from this type of error. She defends the proletariat as the true defender of democracy against Absolutism, and even as the bearer of Western Civilisation against Czarist barbarism. We know where this position led, but we sometimes like to forget who invented it. The bourgeoisie did not betray the revolutions of the 19th century. It simply defended its class interests against the proletariat, and used it as cannon fodder against inconvenient historical entities. An examination of Marx and Engels's own accounts of the bourgeois movements of the 19th century shows they were wrong to support them. This is not an "eternal truth", but it's at least 200 years old. Democracy leads Luxemburg to make major concessions to the idea of national self-determination, arguing that the working class constitutes the "majority" of the nation. Rather than simply showing nationalism is the enemy of the working class, period, she claims the bourgeoisie distorts or makes meaningless the idea of nationalism. This leads to the weakest but most famous of her arguments against Lenin – national liberation is impossible because of the domination of the planet by imperialism.[11] We reject nationalism as anti-working class not because the bourgeoisie betrays it, not because it's impossible, but because it ties the proletariat to its class enemy and divides it amongst itself. Luxemburg does not start from an internationalist position, but from a longing for "the harmony of interests of all nationalities" as "the national policy of the proletariat".[12] She assumes that nations are real. However, she could claim Marx as a progenitor even whilst arguing with some of his conclusions. The idea of progress, the idea the proletariat should support the revolutionary bourgeois smashing of old feudal fetters, and its democratic corollary, were defended by Marx better than anyone. We

[11] "The National Question and Autonomy," in *The National Question*. R. Luxemburg. Monthly Review Press 1977. pp. 130–131.

[12] *The National Question*. R. Luxemburg. Monthly Review Press 1977. p. 168.

must rescue these ideas from the gnawing criticism of the mice and give them to the cat.

What Is Imperialism?

In this section, I briefly go through some of the most important definitions of imperialism to see whether any of them are any use to our analysis of the modern capitalist world.

Imperialism = Empires

This nominalist understanding of imperialism is clearly useless, since it makes nations with clearly defined Empires like the USSR more imperialist than those with few formally-defined colonies like the USA. It would make Portugal imperialist until 1974 but not Spain. Obviously, if we accept the bourgeois picture of the world divided into nations, we can easily see that some nations dominate others by means other that crude military colonialism.

Nations tend to dominate others

Again assuming the reality of nation states (though unlike Bukharin, I examine this assumption in depth in subsequent sections), even making this assumption, this definition is no use either. Almost every country is more powerful than others, and tries to dominate them. Russia tends to dominate Vietnam, which tends to dominate Kampuchea. India, apparently ignorant of Marx's advice that a nation which rules another can never itself be free, leans very heavily on Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and would do so on Pakistan were not the latter dominated by the USA. Even the smallest countries harbour imperialist designs on their neighbours, e.g. Albania wouldn't mind Kosovo, currently in Yugoslavia. "Nations tend to dominate

tion, this underlines the fact that the difference between a wage-slave and a chattel-slave is merely formal. Many wage-slaves have been denied the 'right' to leave their job, just as chattel slaves.

However chattel slavery does have an important economic significance — in terms of the circulation of money, in particular the circulation of currency. Thus it was possible for the bourgeoisie to develop profitable enterprises in the Americas whilst keeping currency in Britain. During this period, the bourgeoisie had not developed the economy much either at the theoretical or practical level. By keeping the money circulating in Britain, they were able to confront the proletariat with ever increasing quantums of money circulating around them. The West Indian lobby was very powerful as a result, and was able to mobilise the state in defense of its interests. By the end of the eighteenth century, this faction of the bourgeoisie was able to finance the West Indian Marine Police, based in Wapping (1798). Their role was to police the docks, where proletarians were lifting more than half of the goods arriving in London. (Also at this time monetary wages were not greatly developed in London itself, dockers being paid in sugar. In the case of coal-porters, the bosses had contracts with publicans. The workers lived in the pubs, and were provided with food, drink and a bit of entertainment whilst they carried out the work for the landlord — the cash never passed through their hands).

The capitalist mode of production, in terms of wage-slavery was patchily developed. Certainly the anti-slavery petition which gained massive working class support was to some extent motivated by the fear that the bourgeoisie wished to extend chattel slavery to the metropolitan areas. No doubt some factions of the bourgeoisie wnated to do this, whereas those whose self-interest was more enlightened by the emerging economic 'science' saw the development of wage slavery and commodity relations had more sophisticated ideas.

British capitalism, then the leading capitalism of the world, made great changes at the end of the eighteenth century — it came

but fails to point out that this was in a period when imperialism was generally carried out by companies i.e. directly by cliques of the bourgeoisie without the backing of the state — in other words by private capital. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, imperialism was essential in order for the bourgeoisie to gain mastery over the proletariat. Following the English revolution, the bourgeoisie were unable to simply consolidate their power. They were being squeezed between the remnants of the aristocracy, most of which had survived, although substantially weakened, and an underclass composed of artisans and wage-labourers. Their grasp of state power was weak and had to be backed up by the army, which is why Cromwell became their leader. It was essential that they consolidate their power against the landowners by developing a source of wealth. Thus we have Cromwell's 'Western Plan' which involved the development of colonies in Ireland, America, and the West Indies. The triangular trade of Slaves from Africa to the Americas, sugar, cotton, tobacco from the Americas to Europe, and gin and guns from Europe to Africa, gave them a trade circuit by which they made their fortunes. This amounted to 'primitive accumulation', in that the slavery — chattel slavery — in the Americas provided the motor for this process. Several points have to be made about this.

Whilst the sheer brutality of slavery has been well chronicled, in many ways the conditions of life slaves were subjected to were not so different from that of workers being proletarianised in the industrial revolution. In fact, the crucial factor was the profitability of the plantation which depended on the competence of the plantation manager, the productivity of the soil and the state of the commodity market. Skilled slaves fared better than unskilled, just as other skilled proletarians do. Unskilled slaves were more easily replaced by raw slaves, and hence were more readily worked to death, or simply murdered in barbaric ways for the amusement of plantation managers. When we look at the level of murder carried out by bosses and foremen in Russian factories before the revolu-

others" leads to the view that nearly all countries are imperialist, and is therefore no good.

International Capitalism in the Epoch of Decadence

Defining imperialism as international capitalism also lacks utility. When the left communist paper *Teachers Voice* called for "Imperialism Out of the Gulf", it didn't mean International Capitalism out of the Gulf. It meant a specific policy of a specific section of world capital, or to put it another way "Yankee Go Home". Imperialism is only useful as a definition if it means a specific type of capitalism. If this is worth fighting more than humdrum ordinary capitalism (i.e. more than just waging a permanent and total war against) then we will have found a useful definition. The only possibility for defining imperialism as international capitalism is to use it as a synonym for capitalist decadence. This theory depends on Marx's teleological view of history as a succession of stages, of modes of production each giving birth to its successor, each having a given historical "task". We can either accept or reject the idea of refutation as a criterion of meaning – the idea that a statement is meaningful if you can say how to prove or disprove it. If we reject it, on what grounds could we accept or reject Marx's teleology? Why not, for example, accept the Roman paradigm of history instead? The Ancient Romans were quite convinced that history was a series of increasingly degenerate stages. But if we accept refutation, how could we refute or verify Marx's vision of history? It's difficult to reconcile decadence with the materialist conception as defined in *The German Ideology* (see section 1). The most coherent argument for decadence derives from the view that capitalism created the world economy and thus completed its historic task. But this is difficult to measure. Capitalism is still increasing its domination of the world. Pannekoek used the theory of decadence to excuse his participation in Parliamentary Social Democracy up till 1914. This illustrates one of the major problems with decadence – if you get the

date of capitalist decadence slightly too late, you could end up supporting one faction of the bourgeoisie against another. Decadence was of little use to Pannekoek and the German and Dutch Left in any case – they supported national struggles until after world war two. How to tell if your mode of production is Decadent. Easy – just look at the relations of production. Are they forms for the development of the forces of production, or fetters on that development? If the latter, your mode of production is decadent. It's as easy as that! Capitalism develops the proletariat, among other things. It might be argued that its worth supporting at certain stages for this reason. But a proletariat capable of supporting capitalism in order to further develop the proletariat would be conscious enough to overthrow capitalism and abolish itself. Capitalism develops the productive forces anyway, without conscious proletarian support. Old dynasties did not need to be overthrown by the bourgeoisie in order to develop the productive forces – they just became bourgeois themselves. Japan is a shining example. There may have been a time when it was in the proletariat's interest to support the bourgeoisie. This is a subject for empirical research. It was certainly before the French Revolution of 1789. No bourgeois struggles since have been worth supporting. Marx's dialectical mumbo-jumbo was a cover-up for Victorian Progress ideology. The theory of decadence is an attempt to incorporate Marx's mistakes into the communist platform. We don't want them in ours.

The Ideology of Imperialism

At the end of the last century, some of the rulers of some of the most powerful capitalist states consciously decided to try to tie their working classes to the class enemy by means of the ideology of imperialism. The conquest of Africa and Asia by the mother country was supposed to turn the proles into more acquiescent subjects, particularly if they felt they had material interests in colonialism. This ideology has been effective. British and French workers,

the contradiction between Labour and Capital does not exist, nor even that it doesn't permeate capitalist social relations. However, I do contend that abstract forms have to exist in a material way, that far from a cosmological struggle between the forces of light (capital) and the forces of dark (labour) meeting on metaphysical plane, we live in a world in which historical processes have provided the arena by which these antagonisms are played out. We have no need of paraphrasing William Blake in a modern idiom.

Imperialism, nations are real, and even though they are not bogies they still get up our noses. They are real and they have to be abolished. This is an aspect of our programme, but merely an aspect. When they are promoted as ends in themselves, sufficient in themselves to 'liberate us from oppression', we should be aware that we are being conned. Likewise, to liquidate ourselves into movements which simply assume the task of overthrowing nationalism or imperialism is to become hoodwinked by a capitalist faction which merely aims to use us as cannon fonder. In opposition to the old Maoist doctrine that "My enemy's enemy is my friend", and opting for the secondary contradiction to defeat the primary contradiction, we put forward proletarian autonomy we fight for our class interest, broadening our scope to the extent that we are able to broaden our specific struggles.

Imperialism

The Wildcat discussion document treats imperialism as an ideology, working from models derived from the late nineteenth century/ early twentieth century (Lenin, Luxemburg, Hilferding, Bukharin) — models which refer to a specific period of imperialism i.e that between the partition of Africa at the treaty of Berlin, and the collapse of that order in 1914. This is insufficient. RB rightly mentions that India and Indonesia were colonised by companies,

Appendix: Hegel on acid

A response to 'Marxists and the so-called problem of imperialism'

Method

The Wildcat discussion document reduces all social reality to "*one fundamental contradiction: the invariant class antagonism between international labour and international capital*" — we could call this 'communist fundamentalism', but we would have to keep the quotation marks in order to make it clear that we are talking about an ideology which uses communist language to express what the religious describe as the war between god and the devil. RB manages to sweep the real world — i.e. the sensous world which we move around in — into the dustbin of history, so that we are met by simple abstract forces. When I reach out for a cup of tea to refresh me as I write this, why silly me it is not really a cup of tea but a congealed form of human labour integrating the work of tea plantation workers, dairy workers, water workers, electricity workers, potters plus all the workers who make the means of production which these workers valorise. Cups of tea are ficticious categories, but despite their origin they do have a certain solidity (the cup that is, the tea has a liquidity), which is just as well because I need it to slack me thirst…..

Ah, that's better, now where was I. I have called this piece 'Hegel on Acid' because RB's approach shows many of the traits of Hegel, in particular a reduction of everything to the abstract. In rejecting this approach, I definitely do NOT want to suggest that

for example, have been fairly saturated in the ideas of imperialism for a century or so, and this has helped the bourgeoisie get them to die by the million for "their" respective nation states, and suppress the possibility of revolution. The Falklands war was a sobering reminder of how easy it is for the bourgeoisie to whip up patriotism among the masses of the imperialist heartlands. But pernicious and effective though it may be, it has been no more so than any other form of nationalism. For example, anti-imperialism, the belief of workers in the struggle of oppressed nations, greatly helped the Vietnamese bourgeoisie invade Kampuchea after the Vietnam war. Whereas the American working class, according to the Leninist mythology dupes of Imperialist ideology, have still not accepted the idea of fighting another war after their resistance helped end the one in Vietnam. Imperialist ideology is no worse than any other nationalist ideology. A clear illustration of the irrelevance of the distinction between imperialism, anti-imperialism, and nationalism, is the case of Germany.

As Socialist Workers Party hack Chris Harman admits in his history of the German Revolution, the Comintern supported Nazis as a national liberation, anti-imperialist struggle in the oppressed nation of Germany in the 20's. It was occupied and oppressed by French and British imperialism. Cominternists and National Socialists fought imperialism side by side. Within a decade, this anti-imperialism had become German imperialism. Thus the ideology of imperialism is useless to us, if not to the bourgeoisie. In a published text or platform, this section would be expanded to discuss the legacy of anti-imperialism, showing how it has been used by the international bourgeoisie to suppress the class struggle in countries from Argentina to Algeria, Zimbabwe and Zaire. However this is hardly necessary in a meeting of communists. I would briefly mention here that I would also go on to say anti-imperialism is fraying at the edges, mainly because you can't eat national liberation. The first example I know where a conscious rejection of a particular nationalist ideology has taken place is recently in Al-

geria. Rioters explicitly identified with the intifada of Palestinian proletarians against the Zionist state. This is not far from seeing the Arab nationalist bourgeoisie and the Zionists as the same enemy. No wonder Arafat has been buzzing around the capitals of the Middle East recently.

Hilferding's Definition of Imperialism

"The policy of finance capital pursues a threefold aim: first, the creation of the largest possible economic territory which, secondly, must be protected against foreign competition by tariff walls, and thus, thirdly, must become an area of exploitation for the national monopoly companies".[13] Hilferding's definition, on which most of his successors depended, depends on the concept of nation states. Rather than seeing capital moving around the world in search of profits, he defines imperialism in terms of national monopolies exporting capital and commodities. Nations are more basic than capital. But imperialism was not always carried out by nations: "India" and the colony which became Indonesia were founded by companies. But I am jumping ahead of the argument. As we saw with Bukharin, nations are hard to define. He hurriedly offers "the territorial state conception of economic life".[14] Does he mean that nations are whatever the bourgeoisie think they are, and they make wars on the basis of their "conceptions"? Nation states start wars, and Hilferding's definition can only be understood as the policy of states, particular coalitions of capitalist groups with sovereignty (the monopoly of armed force) over a particular acreage of the earth's surface. I am not going to deny that these coalitions exist. But I am going to address the question of how fundamental these particular formations are, as opposed to others. Is the bourgeoisie split into national sections above all others? Unless they are, the

[13] Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, cited in N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*, p. 107.

[14] *Imperialism and World Economy*. N. Bukharin. Merlin, London 1976. p. 80.

from their fetters, but to destroy them and build communism. For this reason, we should reject the theory of decadence and significant aspects of Marx's method which underlie it, though leaving open the question of whether there was ever the possibility of a joint struggle between capitalists and workers prior to the French Revolution, until further empirical evidence emerges. Imperialism is a non-issue. National states exist, and have a certain importance among coalitions of bourgeois interest groups against each other and against the proletariat, but nations did not predate capitalism, are not essential to it, and were created, and can be abolished by, capital. Other entities may be more important capitalist coalitions in the future. Machiavellianism is an important feature of the way the bourgeoisie operates. Having thrown various bogies into the waste disposal unit of history nations, progress, decadence and imperialism, we are left with only one fundamental contradiction the invariant class antagonisms between international labour and international capital. This must remain our reference point in our analysis of the changing world around us.

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struggle and win the war. Stalin was an internationalist who consciously promoted nationalism because it was in the interests of capitalism. Why should we think most of the world bourgeoisie are any less Machiavellian?

But whatever their origins, nations have a certain solidity. State capitalist trusts do exist. There is a faction of the international bourgeoisie coalesced around the Brush state. This "trust" is more solid than a company like IBM. IBM managers can leave and form new companies or join them. Thatcher can hardly become Prime Minister of another country. But alongside this solidity, there is considerable flexibility. The EC is emerging slowly but surely as a new capitalist entity, more powerful than any of its component nations. When Anderson asks rhetorically "would anyone die willingly for Comecon or the EEC?" he implies that only the nation can inspire the self-sacrificing stupidity that capitalism demands. But people died for the Soviet Union before it officially turned itself into a nation, and some probably died in Afghanistan for Comecon, under the name "socialist fraternity of nations." We should not be complacent about the emergence of EC-ism. If people can die for the rights of the Falkland Islanders to remain British, they'll swallow anything. The bourgeoisie are organised into all kinds of supranational entities. The *Guardian* recently had nightmares trying to work out what "nation" ConsGold belonged to – Britain or South Africa? (See diagram on following page). Like other capitalist entities, nations have a certain reality. But inter-bourgeois faction fights can be more important than nations, and the bourgeoisie's common interest against our struggle is always more so.

Consequences

Capitalism is not a contradiction between a socialised international economy and national forms which contradict it. It can abolish this contradiction. Our aim is not to free the productive forces

above definition of imperialism, though by far the best, is as nonfunctional as all the others.

The Internationalist Approach

There is a widespread assumption among Marxists that capitalist organisation is based on the nation state. The feudal world had no conception of nations because it was ruled by a global religious hierarchy which had no intrinsic territorial limitations. The ruling classes of the ancien regimes had no nationality – neither the Pope, nor the Bourbons, nor the Hapsburgs. These interrelated divinely appointed rulers did not belong to particular bits of the world. England has not had English monarchs since the 11th century.

The emergence of nations is explained by B. Anderson in *Imagined Communities* as the result of three main factors.[15] One is the collapse of religion. According to Anderson, the existential angst caused by the decline of religion partly explains the rise of nationalism as a substitute community. The destruction of communities in general by capitalism partly explains nationalism. Capital replaces various kinds of community with its own invention, the national community. Another major factor is the print industry. The Latin market became saturated, and it was economical for printers to create fairly large reading groups based on fusing numerous dialects together into languages: English, German, French. Luther's translations of the early 16th century did more to create the "German nation" than all the politicians who succeeded him put together. But the most interesting factor noted by Anderson is the conscious creation of nationalisms by the ruling class. Pre-national dynasts deliberately promoted nationalism. Anderson gives plenty of empirical examples to support his argument – the Romanovs, the Hapsburgs, Chulalongkorn – all promoted "official nationalism" to preserve their power over labour and other classes. Nineteenth cen-

[15] *Imagined Communities*. B. Anderson. Verso London 1983.

tury nationalisms became models. Since 1918, these models have been adapted by bourgeois students from around the world at European Universities, and taken "home" to create nations. This has led to the creation of some rather arbitrary nations. Anderson points out that Indonesia "does not remotely correspond to any precolonial domain", and goes on to describe its enormous variety of peoples, cultures, languages and religions, how the people at one end have far more in common with their neighbours across the national frontier than with their fellow "Indonesians", and how its shape is determined by the last Dutch conquests.[16]

The bourgeoisie is a global class. Nations did not emerge before capitalism. There were bourgeois before capitalism in every part of the world. Consciously or not (and there are numerous examples of conscious conspiracy), capitalism created nations. This suggests, though does not prove, that they are not essential to capitalism. Some nations are less arbitrary than others. The shape of Chile, for example, is the result of communication lines in the various provinces of the Spanish Empire. But the current nations of Latin America emerged after several attempts to create larger ones. Uniquely among the authors mentioned in this article, Anderson asks the right question: What are nations, and where do they come from? Bukharin, following Marx and Hilferding, assumes their reality, thus the "world division of labour" between them, and is thus able to invent the myth of imperialism. Partly a spontaneous false community caused by the decline of other communities (though unlike religion, "Bash the Argies" does not express the heart of a heartless world), partly the result of the linguistic centralisations brought about by the emergence of the mass production of vernacular (non-Latin) books in the 16th and 17th centuries, and partly as the result of conscious decisions by a) the old non-national dynasties, and b) the modern international bourgeois intelligentsia, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness:

[16] *Imagined Communities*, p. 110.

it invents nations where they do not exist".[17] Anderson starts by showing that nations are imagined communities (we tend to think we have something in common with our fellow-nationals, most of whom we will never meet), and then tries to work out how they were created and by whom. The consequences can be summarised thus: The Bosses Have no Country. If nations are imaginary, and the bosses have no country, does it follow that the national divisions of the world and their disputes, including massive wars and the nuclear stockpile, are all the result of a massive conspiracy? Do the international capitalist class stage wars in order to attack the class struggle, devalue capital, and all the time know they are united against us? Do they approach world wars in the same way as a game of cricket? The question is not – do the bourgeoisie think they are divided into nations? But to some extent, we would expect their consciousness to bear some relation to the reality if nations really are fictions. There are examples of international conspiracies which reveal inter-bourgeois faction fights which are not national fights. There is the House of Windsor-Hitler collaboration prior to World War Two. There was in all likelihood some collaboration between the various "bourgeoisies" during the war. Surely Hess did not fly to Britain off his own bat? On the other hand, the Allies hung some of the top Nazis after the war, though this is exceptional. Our approach does not depend on the bourgeoisie's consciousness of its own international interests. Some are more conscious than others. George V and Jacques Delors are more internationalist than Galtieri. Whether or not Galtieri knew he was acting in the interests of British and international capital by attacking the Falkland Islands, this is the reality. The best examples of Machiavellian nationalism are in Russia. The Romanovs decided they were Russian nationalists out of conscious choice. Stalin introduced Russian nationalism back into the Soviet Union in order to attack the class

[17] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, cited in B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 15.