

Aircraft Carrier Imperialism

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Imperialism, in its general aspect as the conquest and rule over political and economic entities by a supreme central state power, is not a phenomenon that pertains exclusively to capitalism. Disregarding their social contents, there are numerous types of the same historical phenomenon: an Asian imperialism, a Greco-Roman imperialism, a feudal imperialism and finally a capitalist imperialism. As revolutionary workers, we are most interested in the substantial difference that distinguishes capitalist imperialism from its historical predecessor, that is, feudal imperialism.

Always keeping in mind that we are abstracting from other basic differences, feudal imperialism and capitalist imperialism are most notably distinguished by that fact that one was manifested in state structures that had a basis in territories and land, while the other emerged on the historical stage above all as world domination founded on naval hegemony and therefore on the domination of the great ocean trade routes. Under feudalism a state power that enjoyed land-based military superiority could play an imperialist role; under capitalism, on the other hand, which is the mode of production that has led to unprecedented levels of commodity production and expanded beyond the limits of credibility the phenomena of mercantilism that had already been stirred up in the preceding modes of production, imperialism is connected with naval supremacy, which today means naval-air supremacy.

Capitalist imperialism is above all hegemony on the world market. In order to conquer this hegemony, however, it is not enough to possess a powerful industrial machine and a territory that ensures a supply of raw materials. What is needed is an immense navy and merchant fleet, that is, the means by which the great intercontinental trade routes can be controlled. For history shows that the succession in imperialist supremacy is strictly linked, in the regime of capitalist mercantilism, to the succession in naval supremacy.

The decline of the Venetian Republic, which had risen to great power and splendor during the era of the Crusades, commenced with its loss of the monopoly over trade between Asia and Europe. Previously, the trade between the continents in part followed a sea route, that is in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and in part an overland route. For there was no Suez Canal across the isthmus of Suez, so it was necessary to transfer the commodities brought by ships that docked in the ports of the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea to wagons and then barges that took them to Mediterranean ports, among which Alexandria was predominant.

The discovery of America made Portugal and Spain the masters of vast colonial empires, the first in the history of modern imperialism. True precursors of the U.S. type of imperialism, the Portuguese did not concern themselves with occupying vast territories, but focused for the most part on seizing control over the bottlenecks and choke-points of world trade.

In the context of such a grandiose plan, it was indispensable to seize hegemony over the Indian Ocean, which was the bridge between the two most highly-developed continents of that time: Europe and Asia. Thus, starting from their colony at Cape Verde, conquered at the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese got their hands on Ceylon and Malacca, and penetrated as far the Sunda Archipelago, and then reached China, where they occupied Macao. But the fatal blow to Venetian supremacy was only finally dealt by the Portuguese occupation of the island of Socotra and the Straights of Hormuz, situated at the entrances to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, respectively. The old sea-land routes of European-Asian trade were therefore severed, and ships that attempted to run the Portuguese blockade were mercilessly attacked and sunk. Finally, the Venetian Republic and the Sultan of Egypt, in order to defend their common interests, formed an alliance against the new masters of the Indian Ocean, but the allied fleet was defeated at the Battle of Diu (1590).

The final result of the battle was that intercontinental trade was turned towards the Atlantic routes, which led to Lisbon becoming the center of world trade and the capital of the greatest imperialist power of the epoch, while Alexandria rapidly declined. The Venetian Republic, despite the formidable blow it suffered, would survive for many years, but its imperialist supremacy was a thing of the past.

Subsequent history did not vary from this pattern of development. It shows that bourgeois imperialism is a naval imperialism, because its realm is the world market. Whoever possesses world hegemony of sea power is thus equipped for hegemony over the domain of world trade, which is the real basis of capitalist imperialism. Two World Wars prove that an imperialism that relies on land armies inevitably yields to an imperialism based on naval power. Twice, land-based powers on the scale of the Central Powers and the Nazi-fascist Axis faced off against the Anglo-Saxon powers, which enjoyed air and naval supremacy, and twice the land-based powers were totally defeated.

The Second World War displayed a new aspect; this aspect, however, is explained by the age-old laws of the development of imperialism. For, not only were the land-based powers totally defeated, but one of the powers on the winning side—Great Britain—also emerged vanquished from the vast struggle, and not due to destruction inflicted by the enemy, but because of the superior naval and commercial power of its more powerful ally: America. For Great Britain, the Second World War, with regard to its effects on the worldwide balance of sea power, must represent what the Battle of Diu represented for the

Venetian Republic. For, although it cannot be said that England was destroyed, its naval supremacy and its hegemony were definitively annihilated. The deterioration of its fleet led to the breakup of the British colonial empire that the fleet was needed to hold together.

This is the epoch of American imperialism. It is not by chance that the United States has repeated, at the expense of Europe, the strategic maneuver first deployed by the Portuguese in the 15th century. By cutting off the sea route for the trade between Europe and Asia (everyone knows that the Suez Canal would not have been shut down if Nasser had not enjoyed U.S. support against England), the United States has Europe by the throat and has definitely destroyed any remaining British imperialist traditions. We know this as dollar imperialism: this kind of imperialism does not occupy territories, it even "liberates" those that are still under the yoke of colonialist rule only to harness them to its own financial omnipotence, which is guarded by the most powerful naval air flotilla in the world. American imperialism is the most pure expression of capitalist imperialism, as it occupies the seas in order to rule the land. It is not by chance that its power is based on aircraft carriers, in which all the monstrous deviations of capitalist machine industry, which sever all relations between the means of production and the producer, are concentrated. If aeronautics absorbs the greatest results of bourgeois science, the aircraft carrier is the point of confluence for all the technological sectors that are in the vanguard of the proud march of the ruling class. Those who are so impressed by Russian imperialism that they forget the tremendous force for domination and oppression represented by U.S. power, run the risk of falling victim to democratic and liberal deviations, which are the worst enemies of Marxism. It is no accident that liberal-democratic preaching has its leading pulpit in the headquarters of the greatest imperialist power of our time. Its disciples do not see that Russia, whose expansionism still assumes the form of colonialism (the occupation of the territories of weaker States), is still at the lower stage of imperialism, the imperialism of land armies, that is, the type that has twice been defeated in the world wars. Having said this, our definition of Russia is not changed in the slightest: capitalist state. It is just more evidence for the correctness of our definition. All existing states are enemies of the proletariat and of the communist revolution, but they are not all equally powerful. What matters above all for the proletariat (the proletariat that will see all the States of the world in alliance against it should it take even the first step towards the conquest of power) is to be conscious of the power of its most dangerous enemy, the one that is most heavily armed and capable of carrying its offensive to any part of the world.

The form of imperialism that relied primarily on land forces was precisely that of feudalism. This does not mean that the imperialist powers that are less well-endowed with respect to naval forces are also more likely to be dominated by feudal traditions, for if this were true then Japan would have reached, at the outbreak of the Second World War, a higher stage of capitalism than Germany,

since the Japanese navy had much more battle experience than the German navy. It only means that, in confrontations between imperialist powers, or between would-be imperialist powers, the winner is the power that possesses the largest navy. This is the factor that, with regard to the goals of the preservation of capitalism and its capacities for repression, possesses the greatest importance. With this in mind, what contemporary world power can engage in police operations anywhere in the world, if not the one that possesses the largest forces and the greatest mobility? Russia, you say? No, even though the Hungarian events (the Russian repression in Hungary in November 1956) seem to have conferred upon it the certificate of the leading gendarme of the world counterrevolution. Actually, this task can only be carried out by the United States, that is, by aircraft carrier imperialism. More precisely: by one hundred aircraft carriers. The United States Navy now has 103 naval air platforms, upon which 5,000 aircraft can be based—according to *Il Tempo*—including fighters and fighter-bombers, and several hundred helicopters. Within a few months the naval shipyards of New York and Newport will deliver to the U.S. Navy three more gigantic aircraft carriers: the “Ranger”, the “Independence” and the “Kitty Hawk”. Another aircraft carrier of the same class (the Forrestal Class) is being built at the New York shipyard. These ships, currently the largest ships in any navy in the world, are each 315 meters long, each has a capacity of 100 planes, they have a maximum speed of 35 knots and each has a crew numbering 3,360 enlisted men and 466 officers. How much did the “Forrestal” cost? Two hundred eighteen million dollars, or 130.8 trillion lira. These ships will be surpassed with respect to their size and capabilities by the super-carriers of the NAAC (Nuclear Attack Aircraft Carrier) Class, which will displace 85,000 tons (as opposed to the 60,000 tons of the “Forrestal” Class ships), they will be 400 meters long and, each powered by 8 nuclear turbines, they will attain a speed and a range of operations never before achieved by any naval vessels. Finally, the super-carriers of the NAAC Class will be armed with radio-guided missiles.

We can only image what will become of this machine of domination and war —with the defense budget announced by Eisenhower—now that the US has not only pledged economic aid to the Middle East, which will have to accept it sooner or later, but has also courteously offered to defend the nations of the Middle East should they require (whether they like it or not) its benevolent military assistance!

History has never before witnessed a power of such overwhelming strength, permanently garrisoning the oceans. Aircraft carrier imperialism is the last great redoubt of a class rule that does not understand the meaning of the word death. It is with this imperialism that the proletarian revolution will have to fight its decisive battle. And thus, the Leninist theses on the world revolution obtain a brilliant clarity, and the treasonous pseudo-doctrines of the “national roads to socialism” miserably collapse. The bourgeoisie cannot be beaten one nation at a time, State by State, but only by way of a revolution that affects

whole continents and by way of the insurrectionary embrace of the proletarians across all frontiers. What chance of survival would a revolutionary State of the proletariat that takes power in one or another part of the world have, as long as American imperialism was in a position to wield, from anywhere on the Oceans, its shocking weapons of destruction? In order to shatter the repressive power of capital the proletariat will have to rise in arms on a world scale against the ruling class. There is thus only one "road" to socialism: the international and communist road.

American imperialism, with its one hundred aircraft carriers, is not only mounting guard for its own national security. It is mounting guard for capitalist privilege in every part of the world, anywhere that the proletariat represents a threat to the survival of the bourgeoisie. And why, if it faces a class enemy that has a unified defense, should the proletariat split up its own forces in the frameworks of the various nations? The magnificent American Navy, which is today the terror of the world, will be transformed into a pile of scrap metal if the volcano of the Revolution erupts again. The fire will have to break out in all the nations and all the continents, however: in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, but especially in America. Then we shall see what becomes of a nuclear powered super-carrier when the crew hoists the red flag.

We cannot say that we will not have to wait a long time to see this happen. But we are sure that we will not see it at all if the vanguards of the proletariat do not acquire a correct idea of capitalist imperialism.