

## The Structure Imperialism as the Last Stage of Capitalism

Lenin characterized the imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. With that he was right. And he tried to deduce from it the end of capitalism. With that he was not right. Because the highest stage is rarely the last. A decay form usually follows the high form.

What is *structure imperialism*? And why should this be the last stage of capitalism?

### What is *imperialism*?

*Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.*<sup>1</sup>

One does not have to know every detail of the Marxist debate on imperialism and certainly not to sign every line of Lenin. Nevertheless the definition makes quite clear what it is about: Spatial expansion and new concentration of capital in monopolies and oligopolies. Because of the narrow linkage with the state it is also called *state monopolistic capitalism*.

All in principle, capitalism cannot exist without permanent expansion. So it is understandable that Lenin, as well as Rosa Luxemburg regarded this phase of capitalism as a decaying form since the spatial extension had been completed. But at the beginning of the 20th century this was only formally. Wide areas continued working in form of traditional societies. On the other hand, large parts of life were not yet subject to the capitalist utilization in the imperialistic metropolises, e.g. the biological reproduction, or had to be maintained by the state, e.g. water supply, since the stage of development of the productive forces was not up to be included in the capital logic, indicated best by fordism and the development of the chemical industry. With that a vertical extension direction was still open to capitalism.

The word "rottenness" which Lenin used for this dynamic epoch of capitalism and with which he did not stand alone appears a little inappropriate from today's view. The lefts had also got used to the old liberal and well-adjusted capitalism. Moreover, they had the first World War in front of their eyes and simultaneously the impatience of the revolution. One can hardly describe the state-socialist societies in another way than state-monopolistic and with that capitalistic, too. Imperialism ends more or less with the year 1989. From this moment the late capitalism (E. Mandel) has made his way although the elimination of the remains of the imperialism still lasts on.

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<sup>1</sup> *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin Works 22, S. 271

## What is *structure*?

*Structure [Latin] - Set of the relations connecting the elements of a system with each other.<sup>2</sup>*

In the case of the structure imperialism the structure is the system of the respective society which is subject to the imperialistic attack. The connecting relations are the various human relations of this society both in economy as well as in superstructure and also in all private relations. Capitalism was dependent on the creation and preservation of fixated structures in the previous colonialism and imperialism. This applied both to the native country of the respective capital (nation-states as repair business, large organized enterprises, nuclear family as a private organisation form) as also for the colonies. The latter could happen in terms of the use of found structures as in the case of the "Indirect Rule" of the Brits or else by imposing the structures of one's own as in the case of the French imperialism or else the complete substitution as in the case of the Germans (what led to the substitution of the people = wiping out of the present, too). In mental regards these structures were the great narratives which have partly been taken and adapted from pre-capitalist times.

For the structure imperialism these structures created by capitalism itself become more and more an obstacle. Thanks to the development of the means of communication and modern information processing, more and more proceedings in administration and production get independent of the existence of a central control. The working structures are gradually adapted to it. Fixated processes are replaced by "just in time" production. Great company structures by agglomerates of small suppliers, service providers and internal by changing working groups instead of solid departments. Same applies to the superstructure. The state is changed from a bureaucratic nation-state into a flexible service company. Private life is also affected by it even if the customizations take place more slowly here. Thanks to mobile telephone more and more obligatory appointments take a back seat. Marriage is replaced by phase-of-life partnerships.

While the old imperialism was one which operated with spacial extension, the structure imperialism penetrates into the vertical depth. It is not imperialism which uses structures, it disintegrates these. In a global regard in economy this happens by outsourcing. One must only look at the part list of an arbitrary product. A car gets built out of hundreds of components, nearly all from other companies than the automobile company itself. The superstructure is covered by WTO, IMF and World Bank. While the World Trade Organization provides means for unstructuring within the economic area, e.g. by the ban of non-tariff trade hindrances, IMF and World Bank remove the state structures by structure adjustment programs, essentially structure destruction programs.

In the private life the old family structures are dissolved. While the normal family in the industrial nations is on the retreat and the dissolution of these structures is accompanied by a dropping birth rate because of the lack of another safeguarding, this process is only at the beginning in the developing countries. Here it will be more difficult and more serious since the pre-capitalistic extended family still prevails in many parts. On the one hand, not even the minimal safeguarding systems of the industrial nations have been developed. On the other hand, the psychological individuation is still at the beginning. A religious

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<sup>2</sup> *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, S. 1180, West Berlin 1987. It is translated by myself.

fundamentalism is a reaction to it and therefore also more pronounced in the better educated social strata, which in the first place are affected by this process. It must not be omitted that the extended family does not prepare for a team situation in toyotism. The extended family is carried by a virtually natural cohesion, the teams by professionalism, that means by the unconditional dedication to the necessities of the profession.

The nation-states lose importance by the association at a regional level. Whole continents are competing with each other now. Also many societies which themselves belonged to the controlled ones in imperialism, e.g. China and the south-east Asian tigers. While there was only the competition between the nation-states in imperialism, now permanent simultaneity of competition and cooperation of the spheres characterises the structure imperialism. War also has changed. From the little professional armies of liberalism, over the mass armies of the World Wars, to a variety of again and again newly forming combatants. While the separation between armed forces and civilian population was already called into question in the second World War, it has now become impossible in view of the fragmentation of warfare. Also the aim of a war is no more conquest and victory. The war becomes a general means of politics and is no more ultima ratio. It even becomes a life-form in form of warlordism. In form of the low intensity war and the expansion of so-called special forces also the former imperialistic powers caught up with it. The third gulf war was despite all hightech weapons a complete anachronism as a land warfare with large sets of ground forces and occupation of a whole country.

## Why is structure imperialism the last stage of capitalism?

It must justifiably be pointed out at the danger of misjudging the end of capitalism like this was the case with Lenin and Luxemburg. To escape this danger, one must not only judge the broader extension possibilities of capitalism quantitatively but also qualitatively. This means to evaluate the possible development of the productive forces.

The formal spatial extension is completed. Even the space has been taken. All areas of the earth are included more and more intensively in the capitalist utilization even if some are still reluctant to the consequences.

How did Marx determine the conditions of the end of a society?

*No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself.*<sup>3</sup>

As productive forces the ontological layer of physics and chemistry are included. What is taking place at the moment is the change from chemistry as leading in the accumulation to biological productive forces (see [The Primitive Biological Accumulation](#)). Information technology and nano-technology are also part of these biological productive forces. That capitalism can develop biological productive forces, is proving with all power at the moment. Not only the databases are filled with exponentially growing speed with gene sequences and protein structures. But cell biology is on target now, too. And the surroundings of the cell, the living being, and also its surroundings, the ecosystem, will follow. Chemically marked mindsets are still held onto - more in public than in sciences -, this only shows the gradual substitution the power of capitalism to be able to overcome resistance of the development of productive forces.

There remains one ontological layer which still has not been tackled by capitalism: the human one. But exactly this capitalism cannot do because its exploitation logic is based on ignoring the material, social and emotional requirements of the people. The reification and debasement of human beings either as a pure appendage of the production (proletariat) or the capital (keyword character mask, the more comfortable variant) are essentially inherent to capitalism. The dignity of the people and actual liberty arise from the free association of the producers.

Capitalism does not allow such, only the submission under the compulsions of the exploitation by capital. But capitalism also creates the prerequisites for its sublation. With the evolvement of biological sciences the last dependence of man on nature falls. But these sciences, introduced to the production, confront human beings as second nature, as force of the capitalist exploitation process. The project of technical-scientific emancipation of nature by human beings started with Bacon. What comes onto the agenda with the completion of the Bacon project is the Meta-Bacon project. This is the scientific emancipation of the second nature, the machinery confronting him, by human beings.

The communication technology and the information processing build a necessary prerequisite for this stage because a free association of producers can work only in such a way without central authority. An essential task of all previous governance was the processing of information. At the end of the capitalistic the producers become to be able to do it themselves. Projects on the internet like GNU and Wikipedia demonstrate already

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3 *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, MEW 13, S.9

today the strength of free associations. At the end it will be the economic lever of the socialist production that the free cooperation proves to be more effective and efficient than the capitalistic wage-labour as on a certain development state of the productive forces the labour of the formally free workers was more efficiently than the one of slaves. (By the way: If the capitalists moan about too high wage costs, then this only shows their inability to use given technology so that the productivity of their workers corresponds to the (world) social average or even exceeds it.)

## The structure imperialism as entelechy of capitalism

The previous consideration concerning the end of capitalism determines its end ex negativo. This is unsatisfactory from a dialectical point of view. A rest of contingency stays part of considerations. Therefore it shall be shown here that the structure imperialism positively means the end of capitalism.

Among other things Aristotle determines the form as telos, as an aim of the development of a living being. This aim was understood in the Scholasticism as outside the living being. However, this is a misinterpretation of Aristotle. With Aristotle the aim is in the living being inherent, the aim is the filling of the form as regards to its content (entelechy). In the dialectic the completion of the form is the prerequisite of the transition to the next stage.

Capitalism has resulted from the preform of circulation of commodities. The circulation of commodities is based on the permanent exchange of goods in accordance with their share in an average social labour. The profit arises from the thereby realization of surplus-work as surplus-value. The further use of the profit decides whether we have to do it with capitalism or not.

In the simplest form of the circulation of commodities the profit is simply consumed.

*In the direct barter of products, each commodity is directly a means of exchange to its owner, and to all other persons an equivalent, but that only in so far as it has use-value for them. At this stage, therefore, the articles exchanged do not acquire a value-form independent of their own use-value, or of the individual needs of the exchangers.<sup>4</sup>*

This stage corresponds psychologically with the oral phase. There is no storage of value yet. In the evolvement of productive forces this is a simple mechanical production with many natural elements which finds its first developed form in the ancient advanced civilizations.

In the next form of the circulation of commodities the profit is accumulated, not consumed any more, but not brought again to the production either. It is hoarding. The prerequisite for it is the creation of a commodity whose utility value is the assignment of exchange value.

*Commodity-owners never equate their own commodities to those of others, and exchange them on a large scale, without different kinds of commodities belonging to different owners being exchangeable for, and equated as values to, one and the same special article. Such last-mentioned article, by becoming the equivalent of various other commodities, acquires at once, though within narrow limits, the character of a general social equivalent. This character comes and goes with the momentary social acts that called it into life. In turns and transiently it attaches itself first to this and then to that commodity. But with the development of exchange it fixes itself firmly and exclusively to particular sorts of commodities, and becomes crystallised by assuming the money-form.<sup>5</sup>*

*We followed up this false appearance to its final establishment, which is complete so soon as the universal equivalent form becomes identified with the bodily form of a particular commodity, and thus crystallised into the money-form.<sup>6</sup>*

This crystallizing of the money is mentioned repeatedly by Marx. This already indicates the chemical nature of this stage. By the hoarding this gets even clearer:

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4 Karl Marx *Capital Volume One*, Chapter 2: Exchange.

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*With the very earliest development of the circulation of commodities, there is also developed the necessity, and the passionate desire, to hold fast the product of the first metamorphosis. This product is the transformed shape of the commodity, or its gold-chrysalis. Commodities are thus sold not for the purpose of buying others, but in order to replace their commodity-form by their money-form. From being the mere means of effecting the circulation of commodities, this change of form becomes the end and aim. The changed form of the commodity is thus prevented from functioning as its unconditionally alienable form, or as its merely transient money-form. The money becomes petrified into a hoard, and the seller becomes a hoarder of money.<sup>7</sup>*

*With the possibility of holding and storing up exchange-value in the shape of a particular commodity, arises also the greed for gold.<sup>8</sup>*

*The circulation becomes the great social retort into which everything is thrown, to come out again as a gold-crystal. Not even are the bones of saints, and still less are more delicate res sacrosanctae, extra commercium hominum able to withstand this alchemy.<sup>9</sup>*

*In order that gold may be held as money, and made to form a hoard, it must be prevented from circulating, or from transforming itself into a means of enjoyment. The hoarder, therefore, makes a sacrifice of the lusts of the flesh to his gold fetish. He acts in earnest up to the Gospel of abstention. On the other hand, he can withdraw from circulation no more than what he has thrown into it in the shape of commodities. The more he produces, the more he is able to sell. Hard work, saving, and avarice are, therefore, his three cardinal virtues, and to sell much and buy little the sum of his political economy.<sup>10</sup>*

In the hoarding formation the anal and thus chemical character (retort, alchemy) of this stage of the circulation of commodities gets obvious. It is a matter of adherence and forgoing. Freud equates dirt and excrement on one side and gold and money on the other side in their mental function. The pleasure gain of early childhood arises from the adherence of the excrement. The specific anal fixated character is how Marx described the hoarder. The heyday of the hoarding formation is the Middle Ages.

But capitalism is more than only circulation of commodities. Capitalism means that the surplus is not consumed and not kept as a hoard either.

Capitalism means that part of the surplus is used to enlarge the total amount of the capital. Capitalism is an open, ecological system with that. The earth as an ecosystem requires the supplying of solar energy to compensate for not only the entropy but build up negentropy (Schrödinger). Like the capital reproduces itself on a ever higher stage of the organic composition of the capital, life developed into ever higher stages, so until it has evolved us human beings. Capitalism also will create the prerequisites for a human society. But like human being steps outside the nature, the human society leaves capitalism behind.

Capitalism moves in ever new circulations of money – commodity - money'. Like the evolution unconsciously produces ever new forms of life, so capitalism produces ever new forms of production means. Like there is no central planning in biology but the random together and against each other acting of the individual parts. There are associations of

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7 Karl Marx *Capital Volume One, Chapter 3: Money, or the Circulation of Commodities., Sec. 3 Money, A. Hoarding*

8 Karl Marx *Capital Volume One, Chapter 3: Money, or the Circulation of Commodities., Sec. 3 Money, A. Hoarding*

9 Karl Marx *Capital Volume One, Chapter 3: Money, or the Circulation of Commodities., Sec. 3 Money, A. Hoarding*

10 Karl Marx *Capital Volume One, Chapter 3: Money, or the Circulation of Commodities., Sec. 3 Money, A. Hoarding*

enterprises like those of insects. Definitely the modern development shows the tendency to have not committed itself to a model. The development of enterprises can lead to concentration and to outsourcing.

In modern biology the concept of information plays a central role. Genes are no longer regarded as fixated crystals but as dynamic information carriers. In the single cell, like in the organism, like in the ecosystem, control loops with the transfer of information play a decisive role. The motto "knowledge is power" reaches the full evolvement in the last stage of capitalism. The information society is based on the control and blocking of the availability of information. The central steering is not any longer ongoing but ever finer self organisation of Lean Managements is. Although an in-word of course, reaching synergy effects shows definitely the way.

In structure imperialism the biological form, the circulation of commodities and the accumulation of capital, which capitalism designate in itself, match the biological contents in the concrete occurrence of the biological production means. In structure imperialism capitalism is in itself and for itself capitalistic. This is the positive determination of the end of capitalism, since in the moment of the fulfilment of the form, in its entelechy the dialectical sublation appears on the agenda. The form of society named capitalism can perish because all productive forces for which it is far enough will be developed.



## **And now?**

The considerations represented here are optimistic regarding the end of capitalism at all. It has entered its last stage and removes faster than ever both the pre-capitalist remains as the obsolete stages of capitalism itself. It frees the people from old bonds, too, often enough to plunge them into misery at the same time. Always only to be able to exploit more effectively.

The considerations represented here are pessimistic regarding the temporal end of capitalism. Even if the scientific development goes at high speed, capitalism still must overcome some social resistances while the technical implementation, not least of capitalists who will also stand on the losing side of development. Or just of people who still hold pre-capitalist positions of power. Or just of people who do not want their right of disposal of reproduction of their own to be withdrawn. All in all, however, one must expect the end of capitalism rather within decades than centuries.

Even if one, being a communist, wants to see a faster development one cannot dismiss every resistance to it as reactionary (nevertheless often regarding many resistances, particularly religious ones it is the case). Since capitalism has no planning and no overall responsibility and insists just in the early stage of a development on the economic realisation without knowledge of the consequences, too, it is a task of the left to step in here.

But it is the central task to guarantee the material conditions and the dignity of the people. And certainly capitalism will hurt this one strongly within the next years and decades. Much as capitalism unconsciously drives the development of the productive forces to the end, one can not hope for an automatism of the transition to socialism. There will be economic reasons for the transition. But this must be carried out consciously. After capitalism there will only be a free and conscious association of the producers. Therefore the way can only be to back this liberty already now. This will only work with attention to the dignity and social need of every single human being. An impoverishment theory which accepts the impoverishment of the people for political purposes abuses the people in a way which makes any free association impossible.