

Historicizing the Imperial Mode of Living

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The Imperial mode of living (IML) is a reflection of the development of globalized capitalism as a polarized relation between the imperial center and its exploited periphery. The imperial mode of living is necessary for the process of accumulation of globalized capitalism. The surplus value is generated by the exploitation of low wage labor in the production process, mainly located in the global “South”; however, the realization of the profit is depended on the sale of on the market and thereby by the consumption pattern of the imperial mode of living, mainly located in the global “North”. The development of global capitalism went through different phases and corresponding developments in the imperial mode of living.

The foundation Imperial mode of Living

The foundation of the imperial mode of living was generated on the basis of colonial exploitation in the second half of 19th century. Around 1860, the living conditions of the English proletariat began to improve. For the first time, capitalists were paying wages above subsistence level.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the North-west-European population had become dependent on a number of goods imported from the colonies for mass consumption. Especially sugar, rice, tea, coffee, and tobacco. The most important raw materials for European industry: cotton, vegetable and mineral oil, rubber and cobber was also imported from the colonies, not to forget the continued mining for gold, silver and precious stones.

The improvements in living standards for European workers relied on colonial profits and the relatively low prices of imported goods. The former dangerous classes was gradually integrated as national citizens into what was becoming the first consumer society, and as such played an important role in maintaining the empire. Tea and coffee were regularly consumed by all classes. In 1850, the amount of sugar imported from the colonies was only surpassed by that of cotton. Tea was number four, and coffee number six. Even the poorest classes spent 6 to 7 percent of their income on colonial imports.¹ Between 1850 and 1875, the per capita consumption of these goods increased even more: tea by 60 percent, sugar by 75, tobacco by 18, liquor by 33, and wine by 66.² People were having tea with sugar as well as bread and jam (a new product also containing sugar) for breakfast now instead of porridge, which had been the staple food of the poor for centuries. The popularity of sugar was directly related to the energy boost it provided. While the British consumed it mainly with tea, the French had it with coffee and milk.³

¹. Jonathan Hersh and Hans--Joachim Voth, “Sweet Diversity: Colonial Goods and the Rise of European Living Standards after 1492.” *Economics Working Papers*, no. 1163. Universitat Pompeu Fabra, p. 11.

². G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People, 1746–1946*. London: Methuen and Co. (1949), p. 351.

³. Jonathan Hersh and Hans--Joachim Voth, “Sweet Diversity: Colonial Goods and the Rise of European Living Standards after 1492.” *Economics Working Papers*, no. 1163. Universitat Pompeu Fabra, p. 11.

During the 1870s, real wages in England grew by 26 percent; during the 1880s by 21 percent; and during the 1890s by 11 percent.⁴ The situation was similar in France, Germany, and other Western European countries. Individual capitalists of course resisted the workers' demands, but the concessions they made in terms of higher wages, did not hurt the capitalist system as such. On the contrary, they helped solve the crisis of overproduction by strengthening the domestic market. But the capitalist system could only afford improvements to the living conditions of European workers because of the exploitation of the colonies. The profits from colonial investments helped compensate for the decline in the profit rate in Europe caused by the increased wages for European workers. Globally, this promised to provide a long-term solution to the contradiction between the need to expand production and the power of consumption in the capitalist mode of production.

Colonialism also had an impact on other part of modes of imperial living than the consumption of goods, namely gender roles and racism. The gender roles championed by the workers' movement in the late nineteenth century corresponded to the development of rising living standard. In the first part of the industrial revolution, the ratio of women to men in the industrial workforce were relative high, but during the second half of the 19th century, it fell dramatically. This shift was due to factory legislation, rising wages, and the spread of the bourgeois family model within the working class.⁵ Maria Mies described this process as follows:

“Without the ongoing exploitation of external colonies—formerly as direct colonies, today within the new international division of labour—the establishment of the ‘internal colony,’ that is, a nuclear family and a woman maintained by a male ‘breadwinner,’ would not have been possible.”⁶

White men in Western Europe and North America ruled over their own colonies in the form of the nuclear family with a wife forced to stay at home. This was one of the most important factors ensuring that the unpropertied, and formerly dangerous, proletarian would become a loyal citizen.

The patriarchal family model appealed to those in the working class aspiring to mimic the lives of the middle and upper classes. Capital and the bourgeoisie saw the division of gender roles as a stabilizing factor within the workforce and in society. The only ones protesting were early feminists. The new academic field of humanities legitimized the division in the name of science. It stressed the physiological and psychological differences between the men and women, suggesting that woman's role as housewife corresponded to her nature.

⁴. Elie Helevy, *History of the English People, Volume 2*. London: Pelican (1939), p. 133, quoted in Robert Clough, *Labour: A Party Fit For Imperialism (Counterattack)*. London: Larkin Publications (1992), p. 19.

⁵. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, “Women’s Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male Breadwinner Family.” *Economic History Review*, vol. 48, no. 1, p. 93. In: Foster, John Bellamy and Brett Clark (2018), “Women, Nature, and Capital in the Industrial Revolution.” *Monthly Review*, vol. 68, no. 8 (January 2018).

⁶. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, “Women’s Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male Breadwinner Family.” *Economic History Review*, vol. 48, no. 1, p. 93. In: Foster, John Bellamy and Brett Clark (2018), “Women, Nature, and Capital in the Industrial Revolution.” *Monthly Review*, vol. 68, no. 8 (January 2018), p. 110.

The European workers' movement not only found it difficult to stand in solidarity with the women's movement, but it also showed an almost complete lack of sympathy for the struggles of indigenous and oppressed peoples in the colonies. This was particularly pronounced in the attitudes of the white US working class toward enslaved Africans. As a result of colonialism, racism and notions of European superiority emerged. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon wrote: "Latin America, China, and Africa. From all these continents, under whose eyes Europe today raises up her tower of opulence, there has flowed out for centuries towards that same Europe diamonds and oil, silk and cotton, wood and exotic products. Europe is literally the creation of the Third World."⁷ When Fanon wrote that Europe is the creation of the Third World, he meant it literally. This was not limited to material or economic aspects; in colonial discourse, "European" came to mean "civilized," other peoples were "barbaric." Such claims were made despite the obvious barbarism of European civilization. Democracy and social justice might have been hot topics in Europe and North America, but that did little to stop European oppression, plunder, and exploitation around the world. The distinction between "us" and "them" was necessary to justify this contradiction. Racism reflects the hierarchical division of humankind created by colonialism. The dehumanization of the colonies' indigenous and oppressed peoples was a prerequisite for presenting the Western world as the supposed cradle of civilization.

Like patriarchy, racism was justified by science. The Aryan race was declared superior. It had the natural right, even the duty, to dominate the "primitive races." So-called racial hygiene was a widely accepted practice in early twentieth century Europe. Racism became popularized in literature, for example in Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "The White Man's Burden." Across Europe, Africans, Chinese, Indians, Bedouins, and Inuit were exhibited at fairs and carnivals.

Furthermore, we see the development public education and health systems in this period. In connection with the transformation of the dangerous classes into loyal citizens of the nation, the state became increasingly interested in citizens' concerns and aspirations, in their health, their education, and so on. This was now seen as a source of national strength and wellbeing. New sciences and politics emerged to properly surveil, control, and make use of the population. This is what Michel Foucault would later dub "biopolitics" or "biopower."⁸

All these developments in the mode of living was mirror in the political development. Here Germany serves as the prime example. Bismarck's government introduced a predecessor to the European welfare state of the twentieth century. Health insurance was introduced in 1883, accident insurance in 1884, and a pension system, including disability pensions, in 1889.⁹ Meanwhile, Germany's rising economic and political influence turned it into a center of the European socialist movement. Socialist parties and trade unions were established, with growing divides between reformist social democrats and revolutionary communists. The Social Democratic Party of Germany

7. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books (1961), p. 81.

8. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

9. Zak Cope, "German Imperialism and Social Imperialism 1871-1933." In Ness, Immanuel and Zak Cope (eds.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-imperialism, Volume I*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan (2015), pp. 656-657.

(SPD) became a flagship for reformist socialism and attracted broad support from the top tiers of the German working class. One of the Party's founders and most prominent figures, Wilhelm Liebknecht, said at the 1892 Party congress: "You who sit here are also, most of you, aristocrats to a certain extent, among the workers—I mean in so far as income is concerned. The laboring population in the mining regions of Saxony and the weavers of Silesia would regard such earnings as yours as the income of a veritable Croesus."¹⁰

The leading ideologue of German social democracy was Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein criticized Marx on several points. In his 1899 book *The Preconditions of Socialism*, he stated, contra Marx, that capitalism would not lead to a polarization between rich and poor, pointing out that the living conditions of the German working class were improving. For Bernstein, this was proof that the working class could better their situation within the capitalist system. Since they comprised a majority of the population, workers could seize state power by electoral means and introduce socialism without resorting to revolutionary violence. Bernstein's revision of Marx became the DNA of European social democracy. In the decades to come, the social democratic parties of Europe would repeatedly choose the interests of capital and the nation over socialism.

Bernstein opposed the notion that "working men have no country," as Marx and Engels had written in *The Communist Manifesto*. Bernstein conceded that this might have been the case in the 1840s, but claimed it no longer held true. Workers had become citizens of their nation states, equipped with political and social rights, not least due to the efforts of the social democrats. For Bernstein, the social democrats' task was to reconcile the interests of the working class with those of the nation. Only this would advance working-class politics. This implied that the social democrats had to support colonialism. Bernstein agreed that in order for it to progress, Germany needed to have ready access to raw materials and tropical goods.¹¹

The connections drawn by Bernstein between the interests of the German working class and colonialism were logical. Only colonialism made it possible for the situation of European workers to improve. Colonial profits allowed capital to mitigate the social contradictions within the European countries. It helped turn the dangerous classes into loyal citizens. The specter of revolution was contained.

Colonial and racist attitudes among German social democrats were barely concealed. The SPD supported imperialist ambitions in China and was a strong opponent of Chinese immigration, since the "coolies" were seen as a threat to European proletarians.¹² At the SPD's congress in Mainz in 1900, Rosa Luxemburg was the only member who condemned imperialist attitudes. In the USA, the Socialist Party had already passed a resolution against "yellow immigration" in 1885.¹³

¹⁰. K. Prandy, A. Stewart, and R.M. Blackburn, *White Collar Unionism*. London: Macmillan (1983), p. 54.

¹¹. Eduard Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus and die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*. Hamburg: Rowohlt (1969), p. 177.

¹². Otto Bauer, *Proletarische Wanderungen*. In: *Die neue Zeit: Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*. Bd. 1907, no. 41, p. 489.

¹³. Lydia Potts, *The World Labour Market: A History of Migration*. London: Zed Books (1990), p. 102.

With its reformism, its support for colonialism, and the equation of working-class and national interests, the social democratic parties abandoned the principle of international solidarity and became an integral part of the imperialist system. This was reflected in the official policies of the Second International. When colonialism was debated at the International's congress in Stuttgart in 1907 (only three years after the genocide against the Herero in South West Africa), Bernstein made the following comment, approved by SPD luminary Ferdinand Lassalle: "People who do not develop may be justifiably subjugated by people who have achieved civilization." Bernstein added: "Socialists too should acknowledge the need for civilized peoples to act like the guardians of the uncivilized. ... Our economies are based in large measure on the extraction from the colonies of products that the native peoples have no idea how to use."¹⁴

The common view among European socialists at the time was that colonies should only be granted independence once the working classes of the developed nations had come to power. The idea that the colonized peoples of Asia and Africa could become independent in a capitalist world seemed outlandish to them. The proceedings on the colonial question by a commission summoned by the International are telling. One member, Hendrik van Kol, a Dutch plantation owner on the island of Java, insisted that the values of civilization had yet to reach the colonial world: "Suppose we bring a machine to the savages of central Africa. What will they do with it? Perhaps they will start up a war dance around it. (Loud laughter.) Perhaps they will kill us or even eat us..."¹⁵ The minutes of the congress are full of similar remarks. Lenin, who was present, reported: "Bernstein and David urged acceptance of a 'socialist colonial policy' and fulminated against the radicals for their barren, negative attitude, their failure to appreciate the importance of reforms, their lack of a practical colonial programme, etc."¹⁶ Another German social democrat, Eduard David, put it bluntly: "Europe needs colonies. It does not have enough of them. Without them, we would be economically like China."¹⁷ One is tempted to say: "Exactly."

In Germany, the social democratic strategy of prioritizing national interests over class interests continued to succeed. Under the ideological leadership of Karl Kautsky, the SPD became Europe's strongest and most influential social democratic party. In the 1912 Reichstag elections, it received 34.8 percent of the popular vote, more than any of the other contenders. In 1914, it joined the liberal and conservative parties in their decision to use bonds to finance the war, despite desperate appeals by revolutionary socialists across Europe to prevent a military conflict that in all likelihood would devastate the continent. But the SPD's decision simply followed from its nationalist line, as it supported German capital in its fight against England and France for global dominance.

¹⁴. Tudor and Tudor (1988): 52.

¹⁵. John Riddell (ed.), *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International*. New York: Pathfinder (1984), p. 14.

¹⁶. V.I. Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart." In: Lenin (1971), *Collected Works, Volume 13*. Moscow: Progress Publishers (1972), p. 75.

¹⁷. John Riddell (ed.), *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International*. New York: Pathfinder (1984), p.

The birth of the US consumer society

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the USA took the next step in the development of the Imperial mode of living the consumer society based on mass production and mass consumption. The background was peculiar. The USA's economic development during the nineteenth century was characterized by a surplus of land and a shortage of skilled labor. Immigrants could always go west and find land. This led to the average wages in the USA were 50 percent higher than in Europe, even though most American workers were unskilled. Skilled European workers had little reason to emigrate, as they could find fairly well paid work at home.¹⁸

The shortage of skilled labor in the US provided a strong incentive to develop technology. The US set new standards in replacing manual labor with machines, both in manufacturing and agriculture. State of the art steel plows were produced and sold by the thousands.¹⁹ By 1855, more than ten thousand horse drawn combines were in use in the USA.

The increase in agricultural productivity was one of the requirements for the USA's industrialization. It allowed American industry to grow. With the industrialization of agriculture, self-sufficiency was dying out. Within a short time, agricultural workers became lucrative customers for both agricultural machinery and consumer goods.

American industry quickly became very competitive. Paradoxically, this was a result of the shortage in skilled labor and of high wages. American industrialists compensated for the shortage of labor with mechanical innovation.²⁰ In the 1840s, the conveyor belt was introduced in slaughterhouses and the meat packing industry. Animals dangling from a crook moved from worker to worker until all of the meat was salted and packed. The conveyor belt soon spread to other industries. An arms manufacturer, Eli Whitney, introduced changeable standard parts in arms production. Whitney could not find enough skilled gunsmiths to process the order in time, so he developed machines that produced standardized gun parts with such accuracy that they could be assembled by unskilled workers. This is a prime example of machinery replacing manual labor.²¹ Standardized parts were soon widespread in the production of locks, clocks, sewing machines, typewriters, and agricultural tools. Craftsmanship was replaced by mass production. One of the first mass--produced consumer

¹⁸. Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*: "England is certainly, in the present times, a much richer country than any part of North America. The wages of labour, however, are much higher in North America than in any part of England." (Quoted from Arghiri Emmanuel, *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade*. New York & London: Monthly Review Press (1972), p. 154.)

¹⁹. Dudley Dillard, *Economic Development of the North Atlantic Community. Historical Introduction to Modern Economics*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967 p. 51.

²⁰. Gerald Gunderson, *A New Economic History of America*. New York: McGraw--Hill (1977), p. 176.

²¹. In 1850, a delegation sent by the British parliament visited Whitney's arms factory. Whitney took apart two rifles and ordered one of his workers to reassemble them quickly. The British delegates were "most impressed." An American worker could assemble about fifty rifles a day—a British worker managed two. (Gerald Gunderson, *A New Economic History of America*. New York: McGraw--Hill (1977), p. 174).

goods was the iron stove. In the 1850s, more than one million of them came out of US factories.²² Furniture was now mass-produced, too, the furniture market having become very lucrative, since more and more people flocked to the big cities and were in need of housing.

The domestic market grew and made mass production profitable; the consolidation of the federal government meant the abolition of customs and tariffs in interstate trade; the government invested enormously in the country's infrastructure, building roads, railways, and canals; and, finally, a common currency was introduced.

The profit rates of US capital were secured by the exploitation of both an internal and an external proletariat. The Spanish empire was crumbling. In the Spanish–American War of 1898, the US conquered Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. The internal proletariat of the USA had grown significantly in the nineteenth century. Between 1830 and 1860, 4.5 million new immigrants arrived in the country. Two thirds of them were Irish or German, most of them had belonged to Europe's reserve army of labor. The privileged positions of skilled laborers and foremen were largely reserved for the Anglo Saxon settlers. They received the highest working wages—not just in the US, but in the world.

Slavery was abolished in 1865, but freed slaves faced deep racial hostility. Racial hierarchies did not simply disappear with the institution of slavery. Black workers were seen as competitors and faced racism and violent attacks by white workers. “Whiteness” became an asset for recent European immigrants, a kind of symbolic capital. It promised better wages and working conditions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the American working class was sharply divided into three tiers: At the top was the Euro-American labor aristocracy, a privileged layer of skilled workers that constituted about 25 percent of the industrial working class, had a monopoly on the best-paid jobs, and was organized in the American Federation of Labor (AFL). One step below were the recent immigrants from Europe, who made up 50–75 percent of the industrial working class, resided in the big northern cities, were unskilled, poorly paid, and excluded from the trade unions and better jobs. At the bottom was the colonial proletariat of Africans, Latinos, and Asians. They did the hardest work for the lowest pay, whether it was in factories or mines, on fields or construction sites, or along the railways. The cotton industry in the South, which had always played a central role for the US economy, was largely based on African--American labor. Cotton production tripled between 1870 and 1910, accounting for 25 percent of total US exports. African--American labor was also essential for the coalmines of Alabama and the country's iron and steel industry. In the Southwest, Mexicans, Asians, and Native Americans worked in agriculture, on cattle and sheep farms, in mines, on the railroad, and in the urban service industry. The workers at the bottom of the labor hierarchy earned about four dollars a week. The industrial workers who had recently arrived from Europe earned six to ten dollars a week. Members of the labor aristocracy earned fifteen to twenty dollars a week.²³ One of the reasons for these comparatively high wages was the exploitation of an internal proletariat that ranked lower than the labor aristocracy did.

After gaining their independence from England, the settlers in the US managed to establish a strong national economy, transforming North America from a periphery within the world capitalist

²². Gerald Gunderson, *A New Economic History of America*. New York: McGraw--Hill (1977), p. 169.

²³. J. Sakai, *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat from Mayflower to Modern*. Montreal & Oakland, CA: Kersplebedeb and PM Press (2014), p. 126–127.

system into its new center. In the early twentieth century, the US had all the requirements for rapid capitalist development: a big domestic market, strong purchasing power, and high industrial profits. The constant flow of value that was required to maintain protectionist policies and a (white) national labor aristocracy was secured by the privatization of the indigenous peoples' commons, the exploitation of an internal proletariat (formerly, of slaves), and imperialist policies in the West Indies, in Central and South America, and in the Pacific region.

This was the foundation of the American consumer society in the 1920s, when hundreds of thousands of modern homes were built and whole new industries emerged, producing everything from household appliances to automobiles. The manufacture of durable consumer goods grew twice as fast as that of nondurable ones. General Electric sold a million Monitor Top refrigerators when it introduced the model in 1927.²⁴ Meanwhile, Henry Ford had started the mass production of automobiles. He optimized the conveyor belt, ensured the efficiency of each step in the production chain, modernized management, and introduced mass marketing. The level the US automobile industry was at in the 1920s was only reached in Europe forty years later.

American consumer society was decades in advance of anyone else. Among the most important customers were well-off workers and farmers. In 1908, Henry Ford declared: "I will build a car for the great multitude; it will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one."²⁵ Fifteen years later, the US was producing 83 percent of the world's automobiles. Fifteen million Ford Model T's were produced, a record that was only surpassed half a century later with the mass production of the Volkswagen Beetle.

Along with the automobile industry, the oil, rubber, and glass industries were also growing. "Fordism" became a commonly used term for balancing mass production with a large consumer market. It was Henry Ford's conviction that workers needed to earn a wage high enough to buy the goods they produced.²⁶ Only a market with strong purchasing power would guarantee ongoing economic growth. Fordism became the guiding principle of the American economy.

During the 1920s, American capitalism seemed unstoppable. A glorious future seemed certain. But it all came to a grinding halt with the Great Crash of 1929, a crisis of overproduction caused by unrestrained speculation. In 1932, the department store magnate Edward Filene wrote: "Mass production is not simply large-scale production. It is large-scale production based upon a clear understanding that increased production demands increased buying."²⁷

The crash of 1929 was only a temporary break in the success story of American capitalism. Government measures in the form of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal ensured ongoing purchasing power. The New Deal consisted of a series of reform policies akin to those of Europe's

²⁴. Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother*. New York: Basic Books (1983), pp. 136–138.

²⁵. Steven Watts, *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century*. New York: Random House (2005), p. 119.

²⁶. Henry Ford, *My Life and Work*. New York: Arno Press (1973), pp. 124–125.

²⁷. D. Hounshel, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800–1932*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1985), p. 307.

social democrats. The United States certainly remained a capitalist society, but capitalism was now regulated by the government. This was in line with the writings of British economist John Maynard Keynes, who argued that government intervention was necessary to avoid unstable markets and social tensions. The US government implemented work projects to reduce unemployment and stimulate consumption. A pension system, unemployment benefits, and federal social services were introduced in 1935. Three years later, legislation for a minimum wage and limits on working hours was passed.

The institutionalization of political framework of the imperial mode of Living

A similar response to the crash of 1929 occurred in parts of Europe. Social democrats became part of governments in many North-Western European countries and implemented Keynesian economic policy to keep up consumption and thereby employment. The Social Democratic governments did not challenge capitalism. The economy is firmly based on the accumulation of capital, a market economy, and private ownership of the means of production. However, it is a special form of capitalist state, characterized by a division of power between the working class and the bourgeoisie via parliamentary mechanisms. This division of power does not mean that class struggle has ended. It is an expression of it.

The capitalist welfare state does not solely represent the interests of capital or the working class. The prime minister of the welfare state is not the representative of narrow capitalist interests or of working-class interests but is simply the representative of the current mode of production. This is how a capitalist welfare state comes to exercise hegemony. As Gramsci explained:²⁸ “Obviously, the fact of hegemony presupposes that the interests and tendencies of those groups over whom hegemony is exercised have been taken into account and a certain equilibrium is established.”

There is nothing new, special, or controversial about the division of state power between classes. In a series of articles from 1848–50, collected under the title *The Class Struggles in France*, Marx described how the constitution of the bourgeois state grants political rights to the classes it exploits.²⁹

²⁸ Antonio Gramsci [1929–35], *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 2, Notebook 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 183. 74 sweden: national and historical context

²⁹ Karl Marx [1850], “The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850, Part II. From June 1848 to June 13, 1849.” In *Marx and Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969). 75 imperialism and the split in socialism

“The comprehensive contradiction of this constitution, however, consists in the following: The classes whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate—proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie—it puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage (sic). And from the class whose old social power it sanctions, the bourgeoisie, it withdraws the political guarantees of this power. It forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment help the hostile classes to victory and jeopardize the very foundations of bourgeois society. From the first group it demands that they should not go forward from political to social emancipation; from the others that they should not go back from social to political restoration.”

The constitution and parliamentary system serve the same purpose. They guarantee the economic predominance of capital while at the same time providing political rights to all citizens. Throughout the last century, this state form became increasingly important for the management of capitalism in the core. What’s more, this state form became the owner of infrastructure, institutions, and even means of production, and the capitalist welfare state developed a significant public sector employing many people a fact that would help to secure its existence.

The spread the American way of life

The end of the Second World War meant the end of European colonialism, the emergence of neo imperialism, unequal exchange both in term of goods and ecology, between the triad of North America, Western Europe and Japan and the Third World, under the hegemony of US. Western Europe was rebuilt on American terms, via the Marshall Plan. The idea was to develop Europe as a united market for US investments, commodities, and culture. The US consumption pattern was spreading to Western Europe and Japan in the late 50ties. The private car, the refrigerator, TV and wide variety of electric equipment became wide spread in the middle class and large section of the working class. This caused a substantial increase in the consumption of oil and other raw materials, and consequently of carbon emissions and the pollution of land, air, and water. The globe entered the so-called Anthropocene, defined as “the period of Earth’s history during which humans have a decisive influence on the state, dynamics, and future of the Earth System.”³⁰

The imperial mode of living, presupposed a periphery to exploit, a periphery which had to abstain from enjoying the fruits of their own labor and natural resources. As Arghiri Emmanuel wrote in 1975:³¹

“6% of the world’s population already consumes over 40% of the world’s raw materials. Present world production in physical terms could only feed, clothe, house, etc., about 600 million people on the American level Just as their inhabitants can still travel by air and fly the world’s skies only because the rest of the world does not have the means to fly and leaves the world’s air routes to them alone. And so on.”

This process was accelerated by the rise of neoliberalism in the second half of the 1970ties. During the past fifty years, there has been a fundamental change in the global division of labor. From capitalism’s very beginning up to the 1970s, the countries of the periphery mainly served as sources of raw materials and tropical agricultural products. In the 1950s, industrial goods made up only 15

³⁰ .Anthropocene Working Group, “Results of Binding Vote by AWG,” *Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy*, May 21, 2019.

³¹ Arghiri Emmanuel, “Unequal Exchange Revisited,” *IDS Discussion Paper* no. 77 (August 1975).

percent of the exports of all Third World countries combined. By 2009, the number had risen to 70 percent.³² Industrial labor had, with rapid speed, been moved from the Global North to the Global South.

In total, the global labor force engaged in capitalist production rose from 1.9 to 3.1 billion people between 1980 and 2011. That is an increase of 61 percent. Three quarters of this workforce live in the Global South. Together, China and India account for 40 percent of the world's labor force.³³

In 1980, the numbers of industrial workers in the Global South and Global North were about equal. In 2010, there were 541 million industrial workers in the Global South, while only 145 million remained in the Global North.³⁴ The proletariat of the South has become much more entrenched in the global economy and is of much greater importance for its continued development. The center of gravity for global industrial production no longer lies in the Global North, but in the Global South.

In the 1970s, dependency theory showed how the development of the periphery—or, more precisely, the lack of it—was dependent on the core countries. Today, the core countries have become dependent on production in the periphery. To speak of “producer economies” and “consumer economies” (connected via global chains of production) more accurately describes current global economic relationships than the terminology formerly used by dependency theorists.³⁵

The first phase of neoliberalism expanded the imperial mode of living by providing cheap goods from the “South” flooding through the global productions chains. However, neoliberalism also had its negative sides. The outsourcing of industry caused pressure on the wage level in the North, privatization and cuts eroded the welfare state, globalization and imperial wars caused streams of refugees. The majority population in the North was afraid that the influx of immigrants and refugees would dilute their imperial mode of living.

The crises of the Imperial mode of living

The Imperial mode of living is in crises as a consequence of the triple crises of neoliberalism: economic, political, and ecological. Global capitalism is running out of periphery, out of humans and nature to exploit. As Brand and Wissen states:³⁶

“the Imperial mode is in the process of succeeding even at the cost of self-destruction. By its nature it implies disproportionate access to natural and human resources on a global scale - in other words elsewhere.”

³². UNCTAD, *Handbook of Statistics, 1980–2009*. New York & Geneva: United Nations.

³³. ILO, *World of Work Report 2011*. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2011.

³⁴. Intan Suwandi and John Bellamy Foster (2016), “Multinational Corporations and the Globalization of Monopoly Capital.” *Monthly Review*, vol. 68, no. 3 (July–August 2016), p. 124.

³⁵. I first saw these terms used in Timothy Kerswell, *The Global Division of Labour and Division in Global Labour* (Ph.D. thesis). Queensland University of Technology, p. 343. *Consumer society* is a term familiar to us, but we have failed to understand that it is dependent on a *producer society*.

³⁶Brand, Ulrich & Wissen, Markus (2021), *The Imperial Mode of Living – Everyday Life and the Ecological Crises of Capitalism*. Page 6. Verso London 2021.

However, the Imperial mode of living still has an immense attraction globally. Neoliberal globalization and outsourcing at first nourished the imperial mode of living for decades, however, it also changes the periphery. The industrialization of the global South especially China developed the productive forces and tuned the periphery into a vital part of the world economy. China became the factory of the world. The new proletariat is less and less prepared to accept the unequal exchange. They want their share of the resources and value they create.

The development of imperialism is in the process of undermining the very existence of the imperial mode of living. In China, India, Brazil the upper class and an expanding middle class adopted the imperial mode of living as their own. However, more important, in recent years, the working class in China, consisting of hundreds of millions of people, have experienced a rising wage level and thereby reduced the imperialist rent and increased their consumption. From a periphery, which contributed to the imperial mode of living in the North, China has become a competitor in economic and ecological terms. This is what is behind the current hybrid war between US and China.

Less people in the South are prepared to suffer for the sake of the imperial mode of living of others. If they cannot improve their living condition at home because of ruthless exploitation or imperial wars, many become emigrants or refugees. They risk their lives to reach Nord America or the European Union in the hope of been integrated into the imperial mode of living. They seek the security and the welfare goods that the imperial mode of living in the center offers. However, this push from the “South” brings out repressive and violent sides of the parasite state. The imperial mode of living is not for everyone, it is exclusive. In the North, neoliberalism had already weakened the social state and its redistribution of wealth. In fear of “diluting” the welfare state, the majority of the population in the Global North refuses to share the benefits of the welfare state. It is certainly not wrong to defend the principle of public and free health, education, unemployment support, etc., but the struggle has to be fought in a global context. An isolated national defense of the capitalist welfare state is a defense of a privileged position in global capitalism and thus support for imperialism. In the defense of the imperial mode of living, refugees and emigrants are meet with hostile national chauvinism and racism. The fact that more and more people are appealed by the attractiveness of the imperial mode of living and at the same time are deprived of benefitting from it in the same way as they were used to, due to the crises on neoliberalism, can be seen as the causes of the rise of the social and political protest from left-wing and rightwing populism.

However, it is a loser game. The Imperial mode of production cannot be defended nor can it be universalized, as there is no exploitable periphery to mother earth. Brand and Wissen states that:³⁷

“We are aware of the hegemonic character of the imperial mode of living – that is, the breadth and depth of its acceptance in society. In that mode, the global North is attempting to maintain something that cannot be maintained, and something that cannot exist on a universal basis is expanded and universalized in many countries of the global South. Therefore, in the face of growing upheaval and increasingly brutal externalizations, we recognize – politically and analytically – the urgent need for genuine alternatives that lead to a solidary mode of living, justice (both social and ecological), peace and democracy.”

³⁷ Brand, Ulrich & Wissen, Markus (2021), *The Imperial Mode of Living – Everyday Life and the Ecological Crises of Capitalism*. Page 187 Verso London 2021.