

I took this from a post on the VWAR-L listserver this past Saturday.->

Imperialism and the Vietnam War

The search for an economic motive does not preclude "dominoes", of course. Southeast Asia is a huge site for US (and other) investment, principally for cheap labor, right now. The threat that this could be "taken away" through communist revolutions throughout Asia was certainly taken seriously.

There was a time that US planners thought of Asia, including SE Asia, as crucial to the Japanese economy's ability to rebuild after the war, and Japan was crucial as a bulwark against communism in the East.

As for the expense of imperialist wars: these tremendous costs are born by the government -- i.e. by the working class, whose labor produces the value in the first place. It's also born by the population as tax-payers. The population bears the cost as soldiers, as well: in deaths, suffering, wounds, and in "income foregone" as a result of military service. Also, the population suffers in terms of other social benefits "foregone," i.e. not received because the funds have gone into the imperialist expansion. Look at the phenomenal decay in US cities compared, say, to Canada -- a much poorer country, but with much fewer military expenditures -- and you can see what I mean. Consider Switzerland or Scandinavia (not imperialist in the modern period) and the contrast is even starker. Or, for that matter, West Germany. The incredible fortunes produced by the US population that has gone, not to enhancing the living standard of the American working class but into the military one way or another, i.e. into imperialism, is staggering.

The costs are "social" -- but the benefits of imperialism accrue to private corporations! Imperialism is a way of shifting income, from the working class (and, secondarily, other classes) to the capitalists, who reap the huge profits from imperialist expansion. Some -- not inconsiderable -- were realized during the Vietnam War, in the form of military contractors, companies who built the US military infrastructure, and so on. But the war was to secure a place to invest for decades thereafter, as the French companies had enjoyed.

So the argument that "it costs more than it gains" would only be valid if THE SAME PEOPLE both paid the costs and reaped the gains. But that isn't true. Capitalists reap the gains; the working people pay the costs.

This was true in the French and British empires as well, and goes some way to explain the considerable (though, unfortunately, not predominant) opposition to imperialism that existed, primarily in the union movements there during the heyday of British and French imperialism.

Imperialism is a loser for the working class of the imperialist countries, including the US. Capital and jobs are exported to areas of cheaper labor, leaving the workers in the imperialist country unemployed, or employed at lower wages. The decline of US cities in the past quarter-century is certainly related to the export of jobs, first to the lower-labor cost, "non-union" areas of the South and West, then out of the US altogether.

This is what US soldiers in Vietnam -- like British soldiers in India, French soldiers in Africa, etc., -- were fighting for: a lower standard of living for themselves and their children; the decay of our cities. A rising crime rate -- because crime is directly related to social conditions. And a culture debased by the values of conquest and violence, all of which are related to imperialism and conquest, however colored over by notions of "fighting for freedom."

This cult of violence, which pervades everything -- sports, entertainment, to interpersonal and family relations -- poisons social life in many, many ways, which all of us can see and enumerate. This, too, is inseparably related to

imperialism.

And all of this only concerns the costs of imperialism to those of us in the imperialist country. There are even greater costs to the "colonials," in this case, to the Vietnamese.

I've only seen one or two attempts to put monetary values on all of this. In some ways, they are beside the point.

Now, you may agree with this kind of analysis, or reject it, or just think about it. But it is simply not permitted in the "mainstream" media, textbooks, etc. -- in "politically correct" (in the true sense, meaning: within the limits permitted by the governmental and corporate elite, a.k.a. the ruling class) discussion. And it's easy to see why.

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