

IMPERIALISM

The most impressive demonstration of the power of the European states in the nineteenth century was the continued expansion of that power over territories outside Europe, an imperialism on so vast a scale that by the eve of the First World War European or Europeanized states had succeeded in establishing their control, directly or indirectly, over almost every other part of the world.

There is a commonly held theory that there was a marked decline in European imperialist activity during the first three-quarters of the century, followed by a new burst of expansionism during the century's final decades. This theory has a certain validity only if imperialism is narrowly defined as the establishment of formal rule over *overseas* territory, but even then it is riddled with exceptions. For in fact a great deal of imperialist activity, including the seizure of overseas territory, took place during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. The British took over the Cape Colony from the Dutch, they occupied or annexed New Zealand, the Malay states, Hong Kong, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Lagos, and the Gold Coast. From their bases in British India they expanded into the Punjab, Sind, Berar, Oudh, Kashmir, and Lower Burma; from the Cape Colony they expanded into Basutoland, Griqualand, and Natal. During this same period the French annexed Algeria, the Marquesas, Tahiti, and other islands in the Pacific; they began their conquest of Indochina; and they attempted to establish an empire in Mexico.

If the definition of imperialism is extended to include expansion into contiguous territories and economic imperialism, then the theory of a decline in European imperialist activity in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century becomes patently absurd. For during those years the Russians conquered and annexed immense stretches of territory in central and eastern Asia, and on the east and west coasts of the Black Sea. In North America, Australia, and New Zealand, the white settlers continued a steady process of expansion at the expense of the indigenous population.

Everywhere in the world, with the British leading the way, Europeans continued to extend their influence through various forms of economic imperialism. By gaining a strategic foothold in the trade of another country and a mortgage on its revenues, Europeans established their influence in many of the countries of Central and South America recently liberated from formal Spanish and Portuguese rule; in the Ottoman Empire and its quasi-independent vassal states in the Balkans and North Africa; and in many parts of Asia. Where their influence was resisted, Europeans did not hesitate to use political or military measures to force their way into foreign markets. The British and the French forced the opening of several Chinese ports to gain entry into the China market, and the Europeanized Americans did the same in Japan. The entire process

came to be known as the "imperialism of free trade," and because it was cheaper and less dangerous than direct rule it was the preferred system of control so long as it remained effective. It was only when informal means failed to provide the necessary framework of security for European enterprise (civil strife, refusal to honor debts to European investors) that the question of establishing formal rule arose.

During the final decades of the nineteenth century there was a marked increase in the establishment of formal rule over non-European territories and an intensification of interest in expansionist enterprises on the part of all European peoples and governments that has been called the "new" imperialism.

The change in the nature of European imperialism was a reflection of the change in the political situation in Europe itself, the increase of nationalist sentiment that accompanied the national revolutions, the new national rivalries, and a greater preoccupation with national security, military power, and national prestige. Before 1871, especially in the period of flux following the revolutions of 1848, the attention of the continental powers, including Russia, had been focused on Europe. After 1871, as it gradually became clear that no major readjustments of the western European boundaries were imminent, national ambitions were diverted into the territories beyond Europe. The British, who had enjoyed a virtual monopoly in overseas expansion earlier in the century, were faced with more intense and embittered competition from France and Russia. Two new European powers, Germany and Italy, entered the field, and even small states such as Belgium joined in the scramble for empire. The new imperialism was thus a manifestation of the new nationalism, an extension of European national rivalries into every other part of the world.

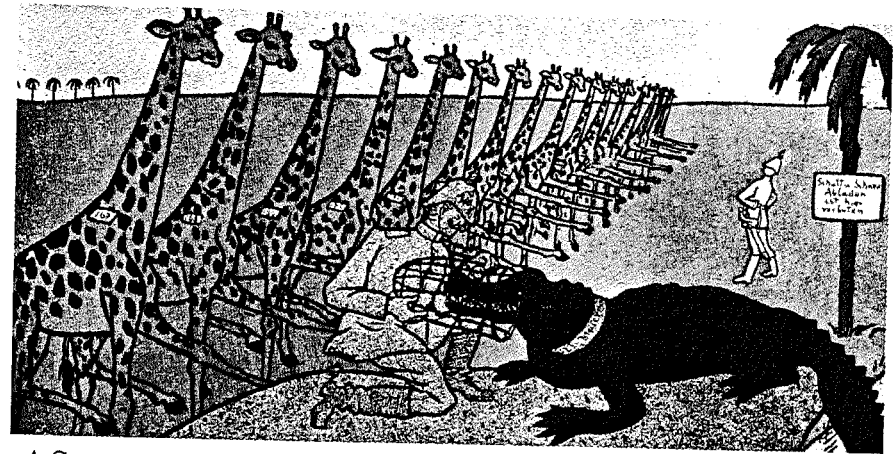
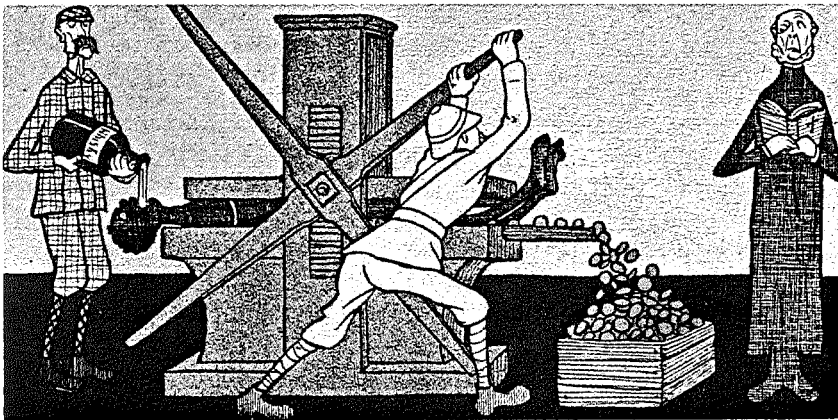
A steadily increasing and at times almost pathological concern about national security gave rise to theories that a country's survival as a great power (which was assumed to be an essential condition for its survival as a free and sovereign state) depended on the extent of its territorial possessions and on the strategic advantages and economic resources such territories could provide. Colonies were deemed essential as sources of raw materials for the manufacture of modern weapons, and as naval bases to protect trade routes and strategic supply lines. Moreover, the need to acquire such territories was growing more pressing with each passing day. Because the total amount of land in the world was limited, a state had to acquire as much territory as possible as quickly as possible while there was still territory left to take, if only to prevent it from falling into the hands of rival powers. Colonization, said the eminent French political economist Paul Leroy Beaulieu (1843-1916), had become for France "a matter of life and death: either France will become a great African power, or in a century or two she will be no more than a secondary European

power and will count for about as much in the world as Greece or Rumania in Europe." Similar arguments were advanced by the historian Sir John Seeley (1834–1895) in England, who predicted that within fifty years the power of states like France and Germany would be dwarfed by Russia and the United States, and he warned that a similar fate would befall England if it failed to maintain and expand its empire. The entire process, in the words of the British statesmen Lord Rosebery, was one of "pegging out claims for the future."

Competitive economic nationalism, combined with the fear that protectionism on the part of rival European states would eventually spell ruin for one's own national economy, provided further incentive for the acquisition of a colonial empire which seemed to promise free and secure access to markets and raw materials. During the long economic slump following the financial crash of 1873, all the major European states with the exception of Britain had abandoned free trade and put up tariff barriers to ward off foreign competition, and foreign observers were confident that Britain too would resort to tariffs as soon as British industrialists, with their enormous head start in the world's markets, began to feel the hot breath of foreign competition.

Not to be overlooked as motives in European imperialism were religious and humanitarian idealism. European missionaries by the thousand journeyed to every part of the world, often at the risk of their lives and

A German view of British imperialism, from the German satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*. The cartoon shows an Englishman pouring whiskey into a black man, while a colleague squeezes all possible wealth out of him; a Christian missionary stands by piously reading the Bible, with one eye cocked on the profits that are being made.



A German view of their own imperialism. This cartoon satirizes the German passion for order and regimentation.

health, to convert the heathen to Christianity, to found schools and hospitals. Many European administrators were imbued with a missionary zeal of their own and were genuinely concerned with abolishing the slave trade, introducing what they believed to be higher standards of law and government in areas under their jurisdiction, and in general bringing the benefits of European civilization to those who had not yet had the good fortune to share in them.

By the end of the nineteenth century imperialism, like nationalism, had developed into a mass cult. Colonies became symbols of national greatness and prestige, and were desired by nationalists of every economic and social class. The imperial idea, like nationalism itself, had been stirred into flame by visionaries, theorists, and prophets; it was subsequently nourished by the systematic propaganda of interest groups, patriotic and colonial societies, and by the nationalist press. But, again like nationalism, imperialism appears to have met some profound psychological need for vicarious excitement, to feel oneself the member of a national team that was making its mark in the world and proving its superiority over other peoples and races. For millions of Europeans, the need for empire became a matter of faith, and no European government, democratic or otherwise, could afford to ignore the clamor of its public opinion—not isolated individuals or small interest groups, but the masses with no immediate political or economic stake in imperialism—for a vigorous expansionist policy.

The prime ingredient in European imperialism, however, and certainly

the most important reason for its success, was that feature of European civilization stressed at the beginning of this discussion: European power. For several centuries Europeans had enjoyed a power advantage over other peoples of the world which had enabled them to engage in large-scale and successful imperialist enterprises, but that advantage had increased immeasurably with the coming of the industrial and technological revolutions. Never in the history of mankind had any group of people possessed such a superiority of power as did the nineteenth-century Europeans—power not only in the form of superior weaponry, but power stemming from the political, economic, and military organization provided by the machinery of the modern European state.

Armed with repeating rifles, machine guns, and artillery, conveyed to foreign shores in ironclad gunboats, a small number of Europeans could easily defeat large armies of Asians and Africans equipped with more primitive weapons. So formidable was European power that the use of force was sometimes not even necessary. The mere presence of a gunboat, or a European emissary backed up by European guns, was often sufficient to persuade a local potentate to sign a treaty or ultimatum giving Europeans complete or partial control over his peoples and territories.

As the Europeans demonstrated in the nineteenth century, there were many ways of using power and many different methods for establishing control over another people or territory: by outright conquest, as in Russia's seizure of the khanates of central Asia and parts of the Ottoman Empire; by setting up a "protectorate" over a native government, as the British did in Egypt and the French in Tunis; by establishing an outright colonial government, as the British, French, and Germans did in central Africa; by governing through a commercial enterprise, as the British did until 1858 in India and the Belgians until 1908 in the Congo; by dominating the economy of a region, as the British did in South America; by large-scale immigration, as the white settlers did in North America, Australia, and Siberia; by establishing a "sphere of influence" in a country, usually after treaty agreements with other European powers, as several European states did in China.

During the heyday of European imperialist activity, imperialism was not only a reflection of European power; it made a major contribution to that power. This does not mean that all European colonial ventures were profitable. Most of the overseas colonies acquired in the era of the "new" imperialism were losing propositions. Although a small number of traders and investors extracted profits from them, they generally cost the mother country and its citizens a great deal more to pacify and administer than they brought in by way of revenue. Trade with these new colonies was minimal (Germany's trade with its colonies, for example, amounted to

only one-half of one per cent of its total foreign trade), they did not attract investments, and most of them were unsuitable for large-scale European immigration.

For Europe as a whole, however, imperialism in all its forms was unquestionably enormously profitable. Europe became the foremost supplier of manufactured goods and capital to the world, the foremost shipper and insurer, and from its visible and invisible exports it derived immense revenues. Far more important, Europe drew on the resources of the world and received the benefit of the cheap labor that produced those resources. Meat and grain, coffee and tea, sugar, tin, rubber, cotton, petroleum poured into Europe from every corner of the world to feed Europe's burgeoning population and stoke its ever-expanding industrial economy.

In terms of national security, the benefit of overseas colonies in wartime was restricted to those European states with a navy powerful enough to keep open the routes of access to them, which in the event proved to be only Britain and its allies. Britain's ability to draw on the resources of its colonial empire (formal and informal) was a major factor in the Allied victory in the First World War. Overseas colonies were useless to Germany during that war, and the international ill-will Germany aroused in the process of acquiring them was diplomatically disastrous.

The most significant and permanent form of European imperialism, whether in terms of economic profitability or national security, was the acquisition of territories which were not only conquered but *settled* by Europeans. The Russian empire, acquired through expansion into contiguous territories, is the only European empire which is still intact and the only European state which remains one of the world's great powers. Europeanized countries such as the United States and Australia are not even regarded as empires by the majority of their inhabitants, but in the eyes of the people from whom these lands were conquered they stand out as particularly vicious examples of European imperialism, for their conquest and settlement was accompanied by the large-scale extermination of the existing population.

For the world as a whole the most important result of European expansion has been Europe's cultural imperialism, which non-European peoples will never shake off. Europeans brought the industrial revolution to the rest of the world; they built factories and railroads; they opened mines; they introduced new methods of agriculture. To administer colonies effectively they introduced European methods of government, bureaucratic centralization, efficient systems of taxation. They trained native soldiers in the use of European arms and military methods. Above all, they brought with them their ideologies, and of these the most influential were not the Christian faith or the principles of law or self-government which European

missionaries, religious and secular, tried to impart, but nationalism and Marxian socialism, which had an automatic appeal to people living under foreign political or economic domination.

It was in Europe itself, however, that the impact of the modern European state, its power nourished by industrialization and imperialism, was most immediate and pervasive. Although its influence was not always resented and in many cases not even recognized, the state was encroaching to an ever-increasing extent upon all aspects of the lives of its citizens. Increased bureaucratic authority, compulsory military service, compulsory education, the new weapons for mass destruction, and the flourishing mass media provided the governments of Europe with means to control and manipulate their populations more effectively than ever before. Pessimistic prophets such as the historian Jakob Burckhardt (1818–1897) wondered how long it would be before all aspects of human endeavor were absorbed or utilized as tools by the new Leviathan.

For most people, however, material progress obscured all evil portents. So impressive were the products of human ingenuity that they seemed to overshadow politics and political ideas. But precisely because of the power for good or evil now placed in the hands of the state, politics and political ideas had never been more important.

CHAPTER 4

The Disruption of the Concert of Europe

AFTER THE defeat of Napoleon in 1815, there was no major war in Europe until 1853. The Concert of Europe established after 1815, with all its weaknesses and defects, proved to be an effective league of princes, who recognized their common interests and stood together against the revolutionary forces of the era. They supported the international settlements of 1815 with considerable consistency and united against attempts to disturb the *status quo*. As a means of maintaining stability in Europe, the policy of monarchical solidarity represented a sense of realism in politics far more profound than that of the so-called realistic statesmen who emerged after 1848—men like Schwarzenberg, Cavour, and Bismarck. The policies of these later realists were revolutionary; they permanently shattered the confidence of the monarchs in one another, and nothing they could do could restore that confidence or reestablish a genuine harmony among them.

The revolutions of 1848 should have given the Concert of Europe a new lease on life by warning the princes of the developing threats to their authority and of the greater need for unity and vigilance. Furthermore, a new and uncertain factor had been introduced into European politics in the person of Louis Napoleon of France. The Concert of Europe had originally been formed to safeguard the states of Europe from French domination, and the rise of a new Napoleon, like the revolutions themselves, might have been expected to encourage the other monarchs to close ranks. That this did not happen was due above all to fear of the growing power of Russia, which obscured the emergence in France of a renewed threat to the old order.

LOUIS NAPOLEON AND THE NEW ASCENDANCY OF FRANCE

When Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of the first Napoleon, became president of the Second French Republic in December, 1848, he