

Leroy-Beaulieu on the Desirability of Imperialism, 1891

Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, 4th edition (Paris, 1891), pp. 841-846, 705-706, 712-718, 737-740. Slightly adapted.

It is impossible not to consider imperialism as one of the tasks imposed on the civilized states for the last four centuries, more particularly on our age.

The present-day world is composed of four different parts in terms of types of civilization. That of Western civilization-our own part. A second part [*is*] inhabited by people of a different civilization, but organized in compact, coherent and stable societies and destined by their history and present character to govern themselves-the Chinese and Japanese peoples for example. In the third part live peoples advanced enough in some respects, but ones which either stagnated or had not been able to constitute themselves as unified, peaceful, progressive nations, following a regular development. . . . India before the British conquest, Java, and the Indochinese peninsula represent particularly this third type.

Finally, a great part of the world is inhabited by barbarian tribes or savages, some given over to wars without end and to brutal customs, and others knowing so little of the arts and being so little accustomed to work and to invention that they do not know how to exploit their land and its natural riches. They live in little groups, impoverished and scattered, in enormous territories which could nourish vast numbers of people with ease.

This state of the world implies for the civilized people a right of intervention . . . In the affairs of the peoples of the last two categories.

It is neither natural nor just for the civilized people of the West to be cooped up indefinitely and jammed into the restricted spaces which were their first home. Nor is it natural and just that they there accumulate the marvels of science, the arts and civilization, that they see the rate of interest fall more each day for lack of good investment Opportunities, while they leave perhaps half the world to little groups of ignorant, ineffectual men who are like feeble children . . . or to exhausted populations, without energy, without direction, who may be compared to old men.

Imperialism is often confused with commerce or with the opening of commercial markets. . . . Imperialism means something quite different from the sale or purchase of commodities. It entails a profound action on a people and a territory, providing the inhabitants with some education and regular justice, teaching them the division of labor and the uses of capital when they are ignorant of these things. It opens an area not only to the merchandise of the mother country, but to its capital and its savings, to its engineers, to its overseers, to its emigrants. . . . Such a transformation of a barbarian country cannot be accomplished by simple commercial relations.

Imperialism is thus the systematic action of an organized people upon another people whose organization is defective; and it presupposes that it is the state itself, and

not only some individuals, which is responsible for the mission.

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Colonization by capital is a very important phenomenon. . . . European capitalists--and by this word we mean not only a banker, but every person putting aside a little money, a modest employee, a peasant, a worker, a spinster or a widow--can work effectively at colonization, the exploitation of the globe, without leaving their firesides. . . . All they need do is place their savings in an industrial enterprise which constructs railroads, digs canals, erects factories, clears the land in the young countries. In putting their savings to this use, the inhabitants of the old world are not in any way delinquent in their duty to their home country. The countries where civilization is old, like England or France, are enormous producers of capital, and the difficulties in employing their colossal annual savings remuneratively in their own lands becomes great. Of course, the substantial funds of the old countries can always be put into industrial, agricultural or social improvements; but the export of a part of these funds across the seas to the adolescent countries, is much more productive for the entire human race. The same capital which will produce 3 or 4 per cent when invested in agriculture in France brings 10, 15, or 20 per cent in an agricultural enterprise in the United States, in Canada, on the Plata River, in Australia, or in New Zealand. It is the same for funds put into building railroads. . . . In general terms, the old countries thus are becoming investors to which the rest of the world offers growing profit. .

The great value of colonies . . . is not only that they serve to catch the overflow population of the mother country, nor even that they open a particularly reliable area of investment for excess capital, it is also that they give a sharp stimulus to the commerce of the country, that they strengthen and support its industry and furnish to its inhabitants--industrialists, workers, consumer--a growth of profits, of wages, or of interest. But, . . . these advantages resulting from the prosperity of the colonies, are not limited just to the mother countries; they extend

to all the countries of the old world and in fact there is not a nation which does not derive a real benefit from this increase in the productivity of humanity. . . . Imperialism has caused the opening of new sources of production. . . . It is thus that unknown products have been brought to the consumers of Europe to increase their comfort. . . . That is the first and incontestable result of imperialism. And this is the second: It is to open the new markets for the sale of products manufactured in Europe, markets more profitable and more expandable than those we have been limited to previously, because the new societies have an ability to grow and to create and accumulate riches infinitely greater than the old societies. Thus trade is stimulated and extended, the division of labor is augmented; industry having before it wider openings can and must produce more and such production on a greater scale calls for new improvements and new advances....

The advantages of which we have been speaking so far are general and apply not only to the mother countries, but to all the civilized countries, even those without colonies. . . . [*But*] it appears to us incontestable that the home countries gain a special advantage from their own

colonies: first, it is the capital of the citizens of the mother country which is sent there, and in this more productive field it is assured of higher interest, which improves the fortunes of the investors, of which a good number without doubt remain in the mother country. Further, the community of language, habits, and traditions, gives an advantage to the home country over all foreign nations even in free trade with the colonies. The colonists retain for a long time the tastes of the mother country, [and] their relations with her have a degree of intimacy which she rarely has with other nations....

It is extremely rare that a colony furnishes a net revenue to the mother country: in infancy it is not able, in maturity it does not want to. . . . Inasmuch as a colony must be administered by functionaries, and defended by soldiers and sailors, drawn from the mother country, it is probable that the mother country will be out of pocket a considerable sum....

Thus it is a great illusion to found colonies in the hopes of revenue: But on the other hand, the costs of colonies to the metropole have been singularly exaggerated by the adversaries of colonization.

The English colonies today cost the country nothing, on the whole at least... Today only her possessions in South Africa require at one time or another substantial expenses. . . . In the not too distant future, perhaps 15 or 20 years, one can hope that the English colonies of Africa . . . no longer will be a charge on the budget even in the least measure. . . . And after all, what are the few hundred thousand pounds which Great Britain actually pays for the upkeep of colonies as against the immense material and moral advantages which they procure for her?