
ERNEST MANDEL’S new work Europe Versus America? Contradictions of Imperialism is bound to attract a lot of attention over its basic proposition—that the imperialist system continues with the same potential for inter-imperialist wars as it had from 1900 to 1940.

The theme of Mandel’s book, like the title, deals with a popular topic in Europe, but of too little appeal elsewhere. The underlying theme of Mandel is that imperialism is functioning today largely as Lenin charted its early growth and functioning—a mainly European-based system, but with an important extension to Japan and according the US with a more central and leading role than in earlier periods.

Mandel poses growth features of American capitalism and consequential repercussions to American imperialism in a way that implies almost an inescapable new war or series of wars or a new redivision of the world through inter-imperialist rivalries developing between the “Common Market 6” leading Europe and America, on the one hand, and between Japan and America on the other. These could, although he doesn’t state this definitively, lead to a Third World War generated by the inner-imperialist rivalries and conflicts, that can only be resolved by inter-imperialist wars, like World Wars I and II. In these conclusions he differs little, in essence, from those of Eugene Varga in Studies in the Political Economy of Capitalism. But US economists like Harry Magdoff, whose paper, read to the first Socialist Scholars’ Conference in New York in 1966, was expanded into the important book The Age of Imperialism, and some of the US and British contributors to the New Left Review reach different conclusions.

Some of the other schools of Marxism don’t subscribe to the Mandel view that a “Common Market 6” or a “Super Japan” will challenge and perhaps enter a new war to supplant the US as the dominant force within the present imperialist system. Consequently, they don’t see much logic in the argument of, for example, the Warsaw Pact countries invading Czechoslovakia over an allegedly imminent West German military invasion in 1968. Magdoff states the contrary, but widely accepted view:

“The struggle to divide the world has been succeeded by the primary struggle against a shrinking imperialist system.”

Moreover, Magdoff doesn’t pose the “shrinking imperialist system” only in a recording of the facts of actual US imperialism’s expansion and growth through control of other capitalist countries’ and Third World countries’ finance, trade, military, communications and political institutions, or by the take-over of so many positions held by European capitalism; his method is much more complex.

To read Mandel’s book with some of the background information drawn from the other conflicting analyses in trade, finance, wage levels in the US, Japan and Europe, trade rivalries and Imperialism v. Third World conflicts and containment seems an essential experience for anyone wishing to know where we are heading in this imperialist world of the 1970s.
Mandel's book is provocative, but unfinished "case" somewhat over-orientated on European capitalism and without enough regard to the multinational corporations and the "Second Empire" of the US now firmly established in its overseas multi-national corporations.

The relationship of the USSR and the Eastern Socialist bloc, on the one hand to China, and to the Third World, appear to enter too little into Mandel's exposition, just as the ownership of so many of the Third World countries' raw materials, so critical to US imperialism security and extension, appear to be under-rated factors.

When dealing with the union movements in the Europe v. America framework of conflict, Mandel is inclined to rely on incidents too unrepresentative to make a pattern and ignores the internationalism of students and their role in developing international anti-imperialist attitudes. He points to the factors forcing some internationalism on unions and their first responses to the new needs by the US auto workers and French glass workers:

"... there is nothing to prevent giant corporations, with ramifications everywhere, from switching orders from one country to another, if it suits them, blackmailing wage-earners or trade unions whose wages are 'too high' or even closing down some businesses so as to depress wages, and systematically boycotting countries where wages are too high". (p. 114.)

Mandel cites cases of firms skirting round those problems and of unions trying to organise to meet such challenges and these incidents are becoming more common. He warns:

"In the gigantic socio-economic metamorphosis which late capitalism is now experiencing sections of the working class could suffer as bitter a fate as they did in the first industrial revolution (although) it has a far better chance of defending itself and of winning self-determination and ultimate emancipation than it had at the beginning of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." (p. 115.)

He doesn't really get to the bottom of the CGT-CGIL isolation from the ICFTU affiliates, but quite correctly suggests that a series of international strikes that simultaneously dealt with the plants of multi-national corporations in the EEC countries would pay off handsomely:

"The true way is by practical and concrete experiences, by ACTIONS carried out on a European scale. As we wrote ten years ago, one strike of European dimensions would do more to give the workers of the EEC a 'European Consciousness' than a hundred European Congresses. Experience, alas, has subsequently confirmed this in a negative way".

Mandel should, it seems to me, have treated the great counter influence to industrial solidarity of the work-forces of Europe within the migrations of labor through the Common Market countries (up to 35 per cent of the work-forces of some countries) with its consequential destruction of homogeneity, solidarity and industrial and political involvement of the total work-force in the industrial and political life of the "temporary" homeland for so many.

In posing a lot of the questions, Mandel doesn't do much more than make a first search for an answer. This may be good for a scholar if not the many readers. His book should be read with Magdoff's The Age of Imperialism.