

Imperial Hara-Kiri

By Scott Nearing

SUCH economists as Marx, Hobson and Lenin, have long held that modern imperialism would destroy itself through its own internal contradictions. The past few years have provided many facts to prove this theory.

Britain is the mother of modern empires. Not since Rome has any single state held so vast a dominion under her power. Her ships sail the seven seas and the sun never sets on her flag.

The British Isles are the manufacturing and financing centre for this Empire. Raw materials and food, produced in the colonies, are carried in British ships, manufactured on British machines and then sent back in British ships to colonial markets. The people of the British Isles cannot feed themselves, or produce the raw cotton, wool, rubber, coffee, hides and oil that they require for the maintenance of their economic life. All of these things must come from overseas.

Through the first half of the nineteenth century Britain had the world markets pretty much to herself. She profited largely, reinvested part of the surplus at home and sent the balance abroad, so that in 1913 she had 20 billion dollars invested outside the United Kingdom. Then too, the population increased. In 1801 there were 9 millions in England and Wales; in 1861, 20 millions; in 1911, 36 millions.

Prosperity seemed assured. The golden age was being ushered in. Then trouble came from two directions. On the one hand a rival (Germany) arose demanding a share of the world economic booty. On the other hand, the colonies and dominions began to do their own manufacturing.

Britain settled her score with Germany between 1914 and 1918 and finished the job with the Treaty of 1919. She took Germany's colonies, her investments, her ships, her iron and coal, her navy. Defeat in the imperial struggle left Germany naked and starving.

As for Britain, the victor, her national debt jumped from 774 million pounds (1854) and 678 million pounds (1914) to 7,460 million pounds in 1919 and 7,700 million pounds in 1923. In the latter year, with taxes high and an unusually favorable settlement with the United States, out of a total revenue of 910 millions, 332 millions or more than a third, went for "debt service." Britain has a capacity cargo of direct problems which she won **with the war**. She has something else: A group of colonies and dominions that learned, during the war, to be economically self-sufficient.

The war stopped the flow of British manufactured goods to British colonies. The latter must produce their own goods or do without. It also created a demand, in the war zone, for all of the goods that the colonies and dominions could manufacture and at top prices.

The response was immediate. Australia had 13,456 boot and shoe workers in 1913 and 15,286 in 1917. Canada produced 751,738 tons of steel in 1914, and 1,538,886 tons in 1917. India manufactured 4,220,000 pounds of woolen goods in 1913 and 9,744,000 pounds in 1917. The local

business interests were building their own industrial machines.

Nor did the process stop there. When the war ended, they went on producing locally because they found that it paid. The war had cut the foundation from under British economic power by setting up rival economic units in each of the British dominions.

The war had still another effect. Britain destroyed one rival between 1914 and 1918. During the same years, she created another—the United States.

Entering the war late in the day; profiteering enormously during the three early war years; losing only a fraction as much as Britain; far better equipped with resources, the United States was able to lend Britain 4.6 billions, to finance her part of the war, to build a great rival navy and merchant fleet, and to make huge investments, even in the British possessions (notably Canada). While the war removed one rival it set another, far more formidable, in Germany's place.

Not only was the war fought in vain by Germany (the vanquished), but Britain, the victor in the imperial struggle, finds herself on the edge of a trembling economic abyss over which her fellow victor (France) is now falling.

Accurately have the economists predicted, and truly will the historians write: "Capitalist imperialism is a form of social suicide."

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