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Empire for Beginners

The Anarchist Library

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> *Empire* by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000) 478 pp. $18.95 paper.

In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in 1988, Bush the Elder proclaimed that we had entered into a New World Order. I was alarmed to hear someone drunk with power — and who knows what else — crowing over the seemingly unlimited authority the ruling powers had achieved. The media tried to pretend it never happened, but the concerns of many, many people — who, like myself, were stunned into disbelief by Bush I's proclamation of power forced conservative political pundits to eventually address the President's megalomaniacal statement. Mostly, they stressed the "fact" that the NWO had been in existence for quite a while and was nothing new after all. Most lefty-liberals fell in line with the conservatives and even tried to outdo them by claiming that the NWO was just more of the same old capitalist imperialism. This isn't so. In Hardt and Negri's book, *Empire*, they describe how the emergence of the NWO/Empire represents a new epoch in human evolution, an event so profound as to put an end to history, not by negating it, but by bringing historical processes to their conclusion. This (Empire) is it: the ultimate fulfillment of human endeavor.

To the authors, this is not necessarily a bad turn of events. To me, however, Empire represents the triumph of the darkest aspects of human capability and must be resisted with every bit of energy by everyone who treasures life.

When Empire hits the fan

> "Our basic hypothesis is that sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and international organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire. . . "
>
> — Hardt and Negri, from the prologue to Empire

The most important aspect of this book is its rebuke of all those who have tried — unconvincingly, yet doggedly — to claim that the neo-liberal era of global capitalism is merely more of the same old capitalism. This is not the case. The era of Empire is as different from the era of European imperialism as that time was different from the ages of the ancient empires of Rome or Persia.

The concept of sovereignty was developed by the ancient empires. The ruling emperor was not only a mighty king, but a god incarnate. His word was thus more than law, but divine writ. His authority not just unchallenged, but unchallengeable. Sovereignty is absolute authority embodied in a single person. This concept is crucial to the processes of historical Progress.

As Europe entered the modern era the idea of sovereignty was introduced there. Modern sovereignty was invested in a ruler whose authority was ordained by a single deity, who handed out royal titles as if his very existence depended on them. With a single divinely anointed, authoritative power established, most of what we recognize as basic tenets of modern societies began to take shape: nationalism, capitalism and urbanization among them.

Having been born and grown up together, capital and the state are co-joined twins, each dependent on the other. The state created the social crises capital

required in order to move into the Industrial Age. Capital rewarded the state with wealth. For instance, capitalists needed desperately impoverished people to destroy in their mines and factories. The state provided them when it confiscated common lands and thereby reduced subsistence farmers and prosperous herdsfolk to destitution.

Even before these implementations of sovereign authority, the ruling powers had turned their coercive forces outward to plunder the fabulously exotic lands being discovered around the world.

Whereas the various peoples of the European states had been welded into national identities — for example, Catalans, Castilians, Galicians and Basques turned into Spaniards — during the era of European imperialistic conquest, there was no real effort made to bring the conquered people into the imperial realm as citizens. Once the discovered people had been relieved of the riches it had accumulated over generations, it was relieved of its lands and forced to produce trade goods and otherwise increase the wealth of the ruling powers. Imperial power was represented in the foreign colonies by administrators who were citizens of the realm. Those they ruled over were not citizens, and thus were at the mercy of the administrator's whims.

At the beginning of the modern era, almost everyone on Earth was a subsistence farmer, hunter, herder, fisher or forager. By the end of the modern era, the Industrial Revolution had become the greatest force of the historic process. Industry turned agricultural people into proletarian masses, accelerated the urbanization of society and enabled European empires to force their cultures upon the rest of the world.

With the concept of the nation firmly established, a sense of historic continuity was manufactured. Instead of remembering their ancestral heritage, the various peoples of each nation were only taught about events and places within their national boundaries. This gave an illusion of permanence to the state, which in reality was only a recent innovation.

The war to end history

Rebellions against European imperialism in the Americas started historical processes which eventually led the world beyond Modernism into a new, postmodern social order.

The new American-style state was not based upon the divine right of kings, but on the popular will of the citizenry. By the turn of the 20th Century, the few nations which had not exchanged the rule of nobility for that of elected legislatures were suffering political turmoil. When revolutionary forces of the masses finally succeeded in crushing the regimes of local aristocracies, a schism formed which was to prevent the development of Empire for as long as the conflict remained unresolved. This was the Cold War era, which began with the Bolshevik coup in October of 1917.

The historic conditions for the emergence of Empire were created during the modern era. People no longer identified themselves as different ethnic or racial groups, but as nationalities. WWI was an attempt to divide the world into permanent national entities and spheres of Euro-American influence. The Russian Revolution upset the effort, not only by challenging the dominant form of capitalism (liberalism) with a socialistic one, but also by serving as an example of

how even the most backward, underdeveloped nation could rapidly industrialize and grow into a powerful, modern state. This was not appropriate for Empire, which requires a single world with every country appointed its specific imperial role.

It was tragically naive of the non-Europeans to fall for the ideals promoted by the ruling powers. The lie was that each nation could develop its own economy along the industrial and economic paths forged by European and American states in order to gradually develop into societies identical to those of the First World. The reality is that the power and wealth enjoyed by the First World is dependent upon the exploitation of the resources and people of lesser developed places. In order to keep those resources available to the ruling powers, lesser developed nations must remain so.

This was one of the reasons WWI was fought — to divide the world's resources among the already industrialized nations. Though U.S. President Woodrow Wilson lied that this war was fought to make the world "safe for democracy," its true result was to ensure that democratic rule be reserved for those who could be trusted to look out for the interests of the ruling powers.

The lie of progressive development is a lovely one to believe, which is why so many people continue to believe it to this day. During the late modern era (the 19th Century), the ideologies of Progress (Manifest Destiny, historical determinism, dialectical materialism, et al) evolved, one from the other, in order to rationalize the horrific "sacrifices" made to further Progress. Genocide, ecological ruin, slavery — no crime against Earth or its inhabitants was so great as to be unabsolvable through the anointment of wealth upon its perpetrators. As long as enough wealth was generated through plunder, slaughter and exploitation so that the ruling powers could benefit, all sins were forgivable.

Such corruption isn't a symptom of modernism, but is the cornerstone of its very existence. Indeed, it would not have been possible for the imperial powers to stifle development, or exploit the people and resources of distant lands were it not for massive political and economic corruption. Its economy would collapse without periodic infusions of corrupt profits — dirty money.

In contrast to this corruption, the Russian Revolution was an abomination — an attempt to create a counter-Empire. The Soviet Union had all the attributes of the fledgling Empire, including a nationalistic doctrine that could lead people in any country that desired to achieve modernity through economic development, into the Industrial Age. Unfortunately, for the communists their development was achieved through brute force, rather than economic persuasion or liberal Progress. Communism's corruption was based upon coercive power more than creation of wealth. Unable to generate vast amounts of reserve wealth via racketeering and shadow economies, the Soviet economy was unable to keep pace with America's rampant militarization, which itself was fueled by economic and political corruption.

The Soviet economy collapsed spectacularly. Suddenly, there were no more obstacles to the final implementation of Empire — the groundwork was complete. The project of reducing people to workers, forcing them off their land and into ghettoes, had been a monumental success. The urbanized masses were transformed into proletarians, powerless people dependent upon industrial production for their survival. Even agriculture became industrialized. Most farmers in industrial states now work for corporations, rather than farming land they own. They would be called peasants or *campesinos* in other countries, but that

would be rude to point out in an industrialized, wealthy nation like the US.

When its rival imploded, the path was cleared for the coming of the one, true Empire. People's lives have been reduced to monotony, their allegiance to the ruling powers unquestioned by minds too dull to conceive of any alternative. Loyalty to schools, corporations and states is instilled in their minds. This is the time of the Pepsi Generation, the culmination of the historic march of Progress.

Empire: You will be assimilated

So far, the retelling of history has been fairly predictable, a classic Marxist rendition of the development of contemporary industrial societies. Marx and Engels proposed faith in the proletarian masses to one day seize control of the state and therefore the means of production. Then we'd all live in a workers' paradise according to their fairy tale.

It is Hardt and Negri's description of Empire that makes this book worth reading, despite the Marxist fundamentalism that skews their perspectives. In their discussions of the composition, function and goals of Empire, the authors truly bring it into focus for all those who are concerned with the various aspects of globalization, yet fail to grasp its totality. The failure to see the big picture is what makes the many critics of Empire sound naive and hopelessly foolish in their shallow attempts at reform.

An ex-lover of mine, a Leninist, once related a story about a cab driver she'd encountered who'd been involved with the Industrial Workers of the World prior to the Palmer Raids. They talked at length about class struggle, the suppression of the IWW and current events. He summed up by saying, "You think it was bad back then, wait 'til they have the whole world."

Empire's definitive quality is its omnipotence. It is everywhere and manifest in all our daily activities. Empire represents the triumph of Western Civilization as embodied in capitalism. All cultures, ethnicities and other categorizations of human beings have been commercialized, turned into different varieties of consumers. Our differences have been turned into marketing devices.

The nationalism that dominated the Cold War era has been forsaken for a borderless land of opportunity for economic endeavor. Regional differences are merely justifications for the hyper-exploitation of workers and resources. Whereas in the postmodern era there were three worlds, now there is one that has absorbed all three and scrambled them in the process. Shopping centers, sports stadia, financial districts and industrial parks are indistinguishable in any country — Canada, Vietnam, Mexico or Nigeria. The same is true for shantytowns, homeless people's camps, landfills and ghettoes.

Human existence has become banalized to the point of meaninglessness, the alternative being horrific irrelevance. The former, present and future proletariat are offered the incentive of the shopping mall while menaced with the specter of homeless beggars. The Third World has migrated to the First, the First exported to the Third, while the Second is being destroyed. The mega-wealth being generated by these processes is being reserved for the elite, who will invest it to further increase its own wealth, while less and less is left for the multitude to compete over.

As factories disappear from what was once the First World, the former members of the proletariat take their places among the multitude — unskilled, land-

less workers whose financial stability is always in doubt. The multitude has taken the place of the proletarian masses, who still retained some distinguishing characteristics as people. The multitude has one identity, one function — consumer.

In former times people could find fulfillment through spiritual service to their communities, or through helping their communities become self-sustaining. The forces of Empire will not tolerate such alternatives. All activities by all people must serve the needs of Empire — to increase the wealth of the wealthy. Governments, non-governmental organizations, even religious organizations all enforce the same omnipotence of Empire by solidifying areas where imperial presence is weak and by sanctifying imperial power.

The historic union of twin power shared by capital and state is a thing of the past. International capital needs no state support, unless such support better suits its needs. Corporations are wealthier, face fewer social or legal restrictions and are not usually held accountable for their actions by the multitude. Their institutions — the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, etc. — shape laws and regulate economic activity. If it weren't for its function of protecting Empire's interests from the retaliatory outrage of the multitude, government would have little justification for its continued existence.

The state must sustain itself through terroristic wars against its own citizens. The state is the muscle backing up Empire's demands. In addition, the United Nations must maintain the illusion that lines on maps have relevance, or it loses its own relevance. Current political boundaries must be maintained, no matter how many Rwandas, Kosovos, Kashmirs, Kurdistans. UN peacekeeping forces enforce the lies of maps in order to keep Empire functioning smoothly. National identities must remain intact, not because they are just, fair or even functional, but because we have reached the post-historic era. Nation-states that exist now have always existed and will always exist, thus says Empire.

Empire and Its Discontents

In the preface to their book, Hardt and Negri admit they were working on their analysis in the very earliest stages of Empire's emergence, between the end of the Gulf War and before the NATO invasion of Yugoslavia. Events since then have shown that they "misunderestimated" (in the word of Bush the Lesser) Empire's insidious nature. Or perhaps they chose to understate the corruption and violence inherent within the New World Order. This is understandable, given the authors' progressivist love of the state. To apologists for the state, atrocities like genocide and widespread political repression are minor inconveniences that must be tolerated in the interest of historical development.

No matter the reason, *Empire* falls well short of a condemnation of its namesake. Because Hardt and Negri believe so strongly in the progressive nature of history, they welcome Empire's arrival with the enthusiasm of any fundamentalist who sees the master's hand in every turn of events.

Hardt and Negri see within Empire the seeds of its own destruction, though they fail to disclose upon what they base this vision.

History Happens

To people who believe in destiny, fate, or historical materialism, determinism, divine will, or other such dogma, when events of significance occur it is proof of some sort of Grand Design.

So, the development of civilization is seen by many people as the crowning achievement of human endeavor. However, it can also be viewed as an abomination against life on Earth. As far as I'm concerned, civilization represents the triumph of the worst characteristics of human capabilities.

Hardt and Negri agree that capitalism and the state were born and grew up together as a result of corruption and crisis. Crises helped to establish the dominance of capitalism and were often created by the state. From the beginning of this alliance, the state and capital have depended on one another. If capital falters the state intervenes on its behalf. When the state grows weak capital recreates it in a manner more beneficial for itself and in a way that pulls the state through its political crisis.

Capital funded the voyages of discovery and conquest that brought about the modern world. This benefited capital, but nowhere near the extent it benefited the aristocracies of Europe and their military agents. Whereas the capitalists reinvested their earnings into colonial plantations and domestic industries, the feuding aristocracies squandered vast fortunes on senseless continental squabbles over territory. The states used these wars to solidify their claim to legitimacy and, of course, capitalists profited from these conflicts.

It's very easy to see how the deliberate creation of social crises in order to justify increased state intrusion into peoples' lives leads to the development of a corrupt civilization. However, Hardt and Negri don't look into corruption at the heart of the ancient empires. Brute force was deployed to bring "law and order" to places destabilized by the actions of the very same forces which later assumed power. This strategy worked as well for Akkadian warrior-kings as it did for Persian god-emperors, and as well for Roman caesars as it did for fascist dictators. It's no surprise that Hardt and Negri don't seem to appreciate the extent corruption infests Empire, since they don't acknowledge the extent it has shaped civilization from its beginnings.

Land and Liberty

Tracing the corrupt roots of civilization could have led to an anti-civilization tendency within Marxist doctrine. That would be heresy, though. The thought that civilization was a wrong turn in the evolution of *Homo sapiens* is a blasphemy against everything progressive-minded people believe. Western civilization is the logical, only possible course for human development. Never mind the rivers of blood and the spreading desertification, deforestation and homogenization of ecosystems civilization has brought to the world. Civilization is not only good and proper, but absolutely essential to the lives of human beings-the ultimate achievement of life on Earth.

According to progressives, industrial society is the epitome of human endeavor. Once the world has been properly industrialized, say the Marxists, the proletariat shall be empowered to rise up and seize control of industry and the state. It shall then lead the world into a new era of material plenitude and es-

tablish an egalitarian utopia, wherein everyone will share the fruits of industrial society, no doubt portioned out by the tooth fairy or her flying pig.

The failure of Marxist revolutionary movements is the main indication for Hardt and Negri's alleged end of history. The workers did not seize control of anything and in the Imperial Age the proletariat has become irrelevant. If workers become uppity in one place, industry packs up and goes elsewhere. Because of the immiseration of the vast majority of people around the world, there will always be people willing to accept low wages, unhealthy working conditions, atrocities against human dignity — anything — in order to earn the right to live with a minimum of economic security.

The only reason this arrangement is acceptable to people is because the ability to provide for themselves has been taken away from them. The point of contention between the masses and the state has always been over control of and access to land. In the Russian, Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese — even the American — revolutions, it was the desire of people to have land to grow crops and otherwise provide for their families that inspired people to fight against the old imperial powers, not the desire to control industry. Industrialism itself would never have been possible if the imperial states had not forced people off their communal lands and into destitution. This made them dependent on wages in order to buy their food at markets, rather than grow it themselves. Until the postmodern era, it was still possible for landowning people to live with very little utilization of money if they wished to. What their land could not provide for them, they could barter for. This independent lifestyle is what people have fought for repeatedly, throughout the modern and postmodern eras.

In the few instances where the proletariat has fought during a revolution, it has, more often than not, sided with the reactionary forces of the state against the genuinely revolutionary forces of the rural masses and indigenous peoples. Even when the proletariat has joined with the revolutionary masses, once the battle has been won the workers and their communist overlords have usually suppressed the redistribution of land and instead imposed industrialized, unsustainable agriculture upon them, just as the capitalist states have.

An attempt to reconcile human existence with Earth's biosystems would put an end to the ideologies of human supremacy, whether of the secular humanist or divinely ordained variety. To claim that people are but a part of Earth biosystems and that we need to live accordingly is to spit in god's face, to turn one's back on thousands of years of historical progress, to forfeit mankind's triumph over Nature, to admit that sometimes things happen for no reason, that there is no divine plan guiding our collective existence, and that we are responsible for the choices we make in life.

The subjects of Empire seem to be reluctant to take responsibility for their own lives and instead surrender them to abstract social forces. This might be due to the hopeless impotence imperial life presents us, with no alternatives possible, or even imaginable. Add to this the overbearing pressure of history and it is little wonder that suicide is rampant and loss of life so routine as to be trivial under Empire.

With no place left to expand capital is forced to return to the same consumers time and again. New cars, new houses, new computers are sold to the same consumers who have the old ones. With wages falling across the globe there will be no expanding markets created through the spread of industry to previously undeveloped lands. Each abandonment of one country for another

brings another downward movement in the global economy. More prosperous consumers — better consumers — will be forsaken to create lesser consumers somewhere else.

With this redundant economic system, we have not only entered a post-historic era, but a post-capitalist one as well. Capitalism is based on increase. Investing money to generate profits, thereby creating more money for more investments to increase production and generate still more profits. Where the post-capitalist economy fails this equation is in the increase of production. Production now remains stagnant, if it doesn't actually decrease. Capitalism has discarded its historical imperative to increase material abundance. The new goal of the imperial economy is to boost stock values. Traditionally, stock values increased when a company increased profits through increased production and expanding markets. However, the dizzying heights reached by stock markets at the end of the 20th Century were created by downsizing rather than expansion. Instead of building additional factories and manufacturing new products, corporations nowadays add to their bottom lines by firing their employees, closing old, outdated factories and building new, updated ones in Asia. Health benefits for the work force are cut, as are their wages. Retirement funds are robbed. The increase in profits generated this way gives stocks a false value. In order to keep inflating their stock values, corporations must continue to downsize. This is not sustainable.

The movement of industry between countries may generate profits for the ruling powers, but they leave economic ruin in the abandoned states. The sudden loss of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in exports can devastate most nations' economies.

The Multitude

The effects of Empire upon societies take various forms according to the level of development each society has achieved in the postmodern era. Hardt and Negri claim that all cultural and social differences are now irrelevant, since Empire has reduced all possible identities to one — that of the consumer. This is simply not true. But to the believers in Progress, anyone who does not fit Empire's single mold will shortly become an imperial subject of perish. For the authors it is unbelievable that there are people who are resisting the encroachment of civilization. The fact that some people are successfully waging war against Empire is inconceivable to Hardt and Negri.

Rebellions in New Guinea, Chiapas and Ogoniland, by the U'wa of Colombia as well as First Nation peoples throughout Canada: all these peoples are struggling to maintain cultural identities outside of Empire's domain. These are primarily conflicts in the way people relate to land. People dependent upon intact ecosystems for their sustenance have no interest in "developing" the resources of their homelands, which are fully developed already, and provide for all their needs. The idea is not to fuck it up and to live within the limits of one's bioregion.

Resistance to Empire is not always so noble, however. Both Somalia and Afghanistan exemplify the horrors inherent in xenophobic hatred of all that Empire promises. Rather than upholding strong connections to the land, many warlords and tribal strongmen are more interested in asserting their own author-

ity over that of Empire's. This distrust of foreigners and their schemes would be a mere nuisance to Empire, except that in the cases of both these nations, and increasingly in Indonesia, political turmoil is preventing imperial access to natural resources. Such xenophobic civil strife has led to tribal and nationalist warfare in Kosovo, Rwanda, Chechnya — all across Asia and Africa. There is no silver lining to be found in these conflicts, but one thing they display is that ethnic and nationalist identities have not yet been supplanted by teaming multitudes of consumers. It seems as though Empire is not quite as omnipotent as Hardt and Negri think.

The notion that 500 years of genocidal carnage was necessary and desirable to bring humanity into one all-encompassing social order shaped by and in the interests of Euro-American economic interests is nothing short of racist. Hardt and Negri would understand that if they themselves were not Euro-Americans. To them, the bloody ascendance of European civilization to global domination is only proper. To many people — those of us of mixed heritage, indigenous peoples and non-believers in Progress, it is obvious that there are serious problems with the direction of civilization. We choose to create different identities for ourselves, Empire be damned.

Empire's "multitude" is a disgusting attempt to create a sort of multicultural racism. Anyone of any race or culture is permitted to participate in the annihilation of social and cultural differences and share in the plunder gained. Empire buys out cultures and discards what is unmarketable. Where it finds rich, varied cultures with lovely folklore, obscure languages and customs, it develops plastic trinkets, videotapes and brothels for the tourists. The local languages die out, the old stories are forgotten and everyone becomes an American.

Hardt and Negri alike underestimate the strength, resilience and intelligence of many peoples. They also do not take into consideration the unexpected consequences of Empire's actions. Worldwide climate changes are beyond its control. This will play havoc with agribusiness, whose frankencrops are also behaving in unforeseen ways.

And there are people within Empire who have come to the realization that they have nothing in common with Empire's schemes and machinations. So, we are witness to uprisings against imperial decrees, like the Zapatistas' insurrection against NAFTA and the international days of action against Empire's administrative bodies — the WTO, G-8, IMF, WEF, etc. Just as worldwide Empire seemed to be imminent, widespread opposition has arisen.

The Relevance of Nations — or Not

Imperial sovereignty does not reside within the nation-state, but is wielded by transnational entities — treaty organizations and financial institutions of regional and global scope. In many instances Empire relies upon the state to enforce its dicta over the objections of its citizens and in contradiction to its own laws. States are becoming increasingly unnecessary to Empire, however.

The Democratic Republic of Congo exists only on paper. In the actual land delineated on maps as constituting the DRC the federal government controls only a segment of the country around the capital. The rest of this vast nation has been overrun by bandits from Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and even as far away as Angola. In this region, a strong, centralized government does not suit

Empire's needs. The corruption at the heart of capitalism has always prevented the development of DRC's abundant mineral resources and potential agricultural production. Most of the people in the DRC enjoy an easy life of gardening, fishing, foraging and hunting. They are too preoccupied by dancing and festivals to work for wages. In short, they have lives that are rewarding and satisfying, with little or no need for consumer goods. Any government which has tried to change these circumstances has met with resolute indifference or determined resistance, and failed. Unable to access the DRC's incredible bounty of natural resources through economic development, Empire fell back upon tried-and-true methods to get at them: conquest and plunder. Since the invaders are not connected to the land and people of DRC, they have no hesitancy to clearcut the rainforests in order to plant coffee and cocoa, or to strip-mine the mountains and thereby poison the local water supplies. How many Congolese have died during these past five years of carnage? Three million? Eight million? It doesn't matter, because these people were not producing anything of value for Empire and were therefore as expendable as they were irrelevant.

And where did these tiny, impoverished nations acquire the military capability needed to invade and occupy a country five times their combined size and at least that much more populous? There are many billions of dollars being made through this holocaust. What Empire wants, Empire gets. This sort of regressive behavior doesn't fit into the progressivists' neat little worldview of purposeful, linear development leading toward utopia. Unless one drops the pretension that this is not racism, that the utopia to be achieved will be enjoyed by the Euro-Americans and their lackeys, and created by the sweat and blood of the rest of the world. The example of the DRC may be the most extreme but it is hardly unrepresentative of how Empire functions.

Plan Colombia, a strategy developed by oil corporations and the US military-industrial complex, will bring about extraordinary political and economic chaos in Peru, Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador. This plan is based on two goals: the flow of oil through a pipeline and the flow of funds through a cash pipeline. Political and economic conflict, like that in the DRC, will likely never affect the flow of either cash or oil from this region, but will prevent the overwhelming majority of the people there from benefiting from either pipeline, or from having any say in the matter. Cocaine production is the big money item for most rural people in the region, the only thing that prevents many from complete economic destitution, which makes the future of the area look frighteningly similar to conditions in Afghanistan over the past 25 years — rival warlords fighting over control of coca fields, some controlled by leftist guerrillas, some controlled by the local state, some by foreign armies, some by organized criminals. Evil, evil, evil, evil, stupid!

The willful naïveté of most of Empire's dissidents is obscene. Their emphasis on dialogue and education will do nothing to change Empire, or challenge its existence. Empire understands what it is doing. All the death and environmental ruin it causes are not a series of unfortunate accidents that occur unintentionally. Billions of people's lives are not necessary for Empire. If they cannot find some way to serve Empire, or if they somehow get in Empire's way, they will be done away with.

Under capitalism, the creation of a postmodern, consumer-driven economy made it seem as if we had entered a post-scarcity era of abundance. In the post-capitalist, imperial era, economies are built around the concept of downsizing.

Economic progress in lands outside of the Euro-American sphere of influence will not be tolerated. Industrialization in undeveloped countries is being carried out by and for Empire. The local people do not benefit from having their cultures, societies, land, families, individuality and sense of dignity destroyed.

People who act in the interest of Empire are absorbed into it. However, when industry flees from one country to a newer, more exploitable one, the economic contractions in the abandoned country ensure Empire's downward spiral. There are limits to Earth's resources. Knowing this Empire is placing limits on the availability of privileges, granted to ever fewer people. These select few, however, will have tremendous wealth at their disposal.

Those who still lead cheers for economic democracy have yet to get a clue about finite natural resources, or about imperial economics. Argentina, a classic example of a developing state that built itself into a First World economy during the postmodern era, had its economy crushed by Empire. Argentinean prosperity doesn't suit Empire's needs, just as Korea's or Yugoslavia's don't.

Hypno-economists want people to believe that China's entry into the WTO will usher the world economy into a new era of expansion. But wages there are so low, they will not support families. And to paraphrase Free Market apostle Ross Perot, the giant sucking sound one hears these days is that of factories being shipped off to China from every corner of Empire. There will be no economic expansion — there's no room left for expansion. Capitalism isn't dying, it's dead already. Yet, its rotting, bloated corpse staggers on. Capitalism is undead, sustaining itself by feeding on the living, consuming life in all its manifestations.

Empire presents an interesting analysis of the New World Order, one which is valuable in helping to understand the power dynamics that define it. However, I've pointed out above how I think some of Hardt and Negri's basic precepts — progressivism, Marxism, Euro-centrism — lead them to sad, predictable conclusions, the main one being their enthusiasm for the arrival of this horribly dehumanizing Empire under which we live. This isn't the most serious problem the book presents, though. That would be the wretchedly obtuse language the authors inflict upon the reader. I understand that translating philosophical and political theory can create syntactical difficulties, but some of this is as unforgivable as it is unnecessary. Hardt and Negri also enjoy redefining words that have recently taken on new meanings, like "virtual" and "posse." At least with these the authors made the effort to explain themselves. I suppose it's everyone's right to use words according to their desires, but it is rather laborious for readers to have to constantly guess at the meanings of words, or even the same word used for widely different purposes.

Still, the authors' tortuous literary stylings shouldn't deter anyone with the patience to wade through such muck. It's very important for us not to treat Empire as a mere continuation of the same old capitalist society. Empire is a different monstrosity, one that recognizes its limitations and seeks to preserve privilege and fabulous wealth for a very few, while discarding the bulk of humanity.

Hardt and Negri are enthusiastic about Empire containing within itself the seeds of its own destruction. They don't know what form this will take and they also make the classical Marxist mistake of believing that the multitude will overthrow Empire by subverting its global nature for their own ends. But resistance to imperial power won't come from within. Anything which takes place within Empire can be recuperated for Empire's own needs. Anything.

Everything. That's its nature.

Resistance must come from without, which means, primarily, creating human identities that emphasize our relationships with the biosystems we inhabit rather than with commodities, economics, the state or nationalities. One thing Hardt and Negri get right is that opposition to Empire must occur worldwide, or Empire will crush it as resistance rises in one isolated spot or another.

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