

IMPERIAL OR IMPERIALIST?

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Every rich and powerful country is “imperial” regarding the poor and weak countries that surround it; the United States are necessarily imperial regarding the other countries of the world; Brazil is imperial regarding the less developed South American countries. Nobody escapes the influence of a more developed society. But this doesn't mean that nation-states are always “imperialist”. A country is imperialist when it presumes that the interests of a poor country are identical to its own, when it rejects the nationalism through which this country attempts to build a true nation-state and to develop, and when it tries to impose its superior truth. It is imperial rather than imperialist when, despite its power, it understands that the nationalism of the weaker country is necessary for it to accomplish its national and capitalist revolution and, therefore, it accepts the frustration of some of its corporations' short-term interests, because it believes that, in the medium term, the neighbor country's development will be beneficial to its own development.

The United States have been imperial, rather than imperialist, soon after World War II, but not for long. Yet Brazil, since the 1990s, has learned to take into account the medium term with respect to its neighbors. This became evident in its relationship with Bolivia, Paraguay, and Venezuela: with the first one, Brazil recognized the need for Bolivia to nationalize its oil industry and to reevaluate some unconscionable contracts that had been signed by previous leaders of the country; to Paraguay, it made reasonable concessions in the case of Itaipu. As to Venezuela, it maintains an amicable relationship with Chávez since his election.

However, part of the Brazilian elites do not understand this fact. They suddenly become nationalist and want the Brazilian government to “defend Brazilian interests” with more determination. They thus forget that it was president Fernando Henrique Cardoso who rejected Alca and started Brazilian South American policy, and that he was the first to understand the difficulties and contradictions faced by the government leader of a poor country that experienced centuries of domination, such as Venezuela. In this policy president Lula was not a pioneer; he just took a step forward.

The time of imperialism is over. Almost all poor countries know that, in order to develop, they need to get rid of foreign dependence and promote their industrialization to achieve their capitalist revolution. And they also know that this is a very difficult national task, because, apart from facing the major countries and their short-term interests, they face huge domestic problems: low educational levels, alienated local elites that would rather ally themselves with foreign elites than with their people, a poorly organized State, the permanent victim of the corruption of capitalists, politicians, and bureaucrats. Brazil, that already achieved its capitalist revolution, understands this issue. Brazil understands that, for itself, it is much more interesting that its neighbors are nationalist and build their nation, thus being able to have a competent entrepreneurial class, a large middle class, and an organized working class. This is the reason why Brazil is imperial, not imperialist.