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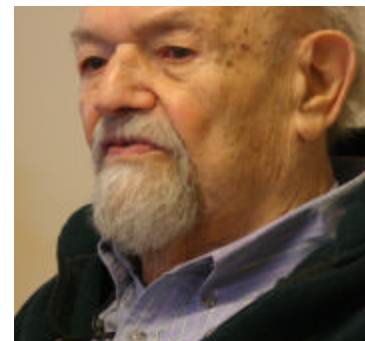
The Sage of Imperialism

A day-long conference co-sponsored by *Monthly Review* and the University of Vermont underscored the values that inspired the work of Harry Magdoff.

Harry Magdoff's major work, *The Age of Imperialism*, was published in 1969, and has since been translated into many languages. A subsequent collection of essays, *Imperialism: from the Colonial Age to the Present* appeared in 1976. At the time that this work was written, the idea that there could be an *Imperialism Without Colonies*—the title of the collection of Harry's most important essays from these books and from *Monthly Review* just published by Monthly Review Press—was highly controversial. Not only mainstream analysts, but also many on the left, found the idea that the United States could be an imperialist power impossible to credit.

Today, with the spread of U.S. military presence around the globe, the new U.S. doctrine of preemptive war, and the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, this perspective has been vindicated for all to see. Whether U.S. imperialism is celebrated or denounced, there is no longer an argument about whether it exists. The major issue today is what direction it will take, and what the results of its project will be.

In this context, the Imperialism Today conference held on May 3 in Burlington, Vermont, was not only a way of honoring Harry on his ninetieth birthday. It was also a discussion of the major issues of our time. An eminent group of the Marxist theorists



and commentators came together for this occasion. In his opening address to the conference, *Monthly Review* editor John Bellamy Foster brought out the contemporary relevance of Harry's writings on imperialism, contrasting them with the liberal critique of the U.S. war in Vietnam developed at about the same time.

The basic framework of the day's discussions was established in the first panel by two very compelling interpretations of U.S. global power today. Peter Gowan argued that the political system through which the United States had exercised control over the capitalist core since around 1950 had become increasingly redundant after the end of the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet Union had weakened U.S. control over the capitalist core, and heightened tensions between the U.S. and Europe. In this context U.S. capitalism was attempting to transfer its hegemony from the capitalist core to the world as a whole, through open use of military force.

Immanuel Wallerstein argued that current U.S. military aggression is a sign of weakness rather than strength. Wallerstein described the Cold War as a "choreographed event in which nothing really ever happened," except that the division of the world into Soviet and U.S.-dominated zones was stabilized. Although U.S.-led neoliberalism had attacked wages and social spending globally since the 1980s, it had not succeeded in bringing them down to pre-New Deal levels. In this context the neoconservative hawks in the Bush administration should be seen as frustrated outsiders involved in a desperate gamble to shore up declining U.S. power by throwing to the winds the legitimacy earned through U.S. diplomacy over the past half-century.

Although Gowan and Wallerstein agreed on many points, there were also important points of difference between their analyses. Wallerstein emphasized the vulnerability of U.S. global power and the limited extent to which it can control the



BIG MAN ON CAMPUS: HARRY IN A VIDEO INTERVIEW BROADCAST AT THE BEGINNING THE CONFERENCE .

chaos unleashed by its policies. In contrast, Gowan pointed out that the challenge to U.S. hegemony came mainly from the capitalist ruling-classes of Europe, and that their challenge was limited to proposing that international law rather than military might be the decisive means for reconstituting the global order. Europe's more hesitant neoliberalism sought a different route to reducing the social power of labor, and did not involve putting forward an alternative social model.

Subsequent sessions of the conference did not address these different perspectives directly. But each of the papers presented sought to develop this broad understanding of the situation and prospects of imperialism today, and to clarify the possibilities for resistance.

The second panel, entitled "How Imperialism Works," consisted of Bill Tabb, Michael Klare, and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. Tabb stressed the bipartisan nature of U.S. imperialism, in which diplomacy and force complement each other rather than being in conflict. Klare described the return of a discourse of geopolitics and explained the Iraq conflict in terms of U.S. rivalry with Russia and China being extended into their sphere of influence. Dunbar-Ortiz stressed the continuity of U.S. imperialism with the genocidal nature of white settlement of the continent.

The third panel dealt with the workings of imperialism within the U.S. "homeland," and was addressed by Eleanor Stein, Bernardine Dohrn, and Bob McChesney. In examining the specific context of U.S. society and politics since 9/11, the panel also turned the focus of the conference towards the question of resistance. Stein spoke of the acts of ordinary decency that stood in the way of the targeting of Muslims; Dohrn of

the way in which the U.S. ruling class program extended beyond foreign policy to a host of social issues—from medical marijuana to abortion—and had to be resisted on all of these fronts; McChesney of the silencing of dissent in the mainstream media and the demands that could be taken up by the left in order to activate a campaign for media reform and democratization.

The final panel of the day dealt with anti-imperialism, and gave what should probably be described as a sobering assessment of its prospects. Sam Gindin described the political and economic mechanisms through which workers in the advanced capitalist countries are drawn into the nationalist project of "exporting unemployment" rather than building a new internationalism of the working class. Barbara Epstein described the divisions and limitations of the massive movement called so rapidly into life against the war on Iraq, but frequently unable to connect the war issue to oppressive domestic conditions. Amiya Kumar Bagchi spoke of anti-imperialist resistance in the third world, describing the unnecessary divisions between political activism and moral resistance, and the dead weight of traditional attitudes to gender and the fascination with huge industrial projects on much of the third world left.

In different contexts, each of the panelists brought out the limitations the existing movement would need to overcome in order to challenge imperialism and become a force for human liberation. Their aim in this, and the aim of the entire conference, was clearly to keep the goal of human liberation clearly in view, and avoid illusions about what will be required



FRANCES FOX PIVEN, PETER GOWAN, AND IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN DURING A BREAK AT THE CONFERENCE.

to achieve it.

This report gives only the briefest overview of the conference, and focuses mainly on the ways the panels and papers fit together into a coherent overall enquiry. The papers themselves have been published in the summer 2003 issue of *Monthly Review*.

There was also a good deal of lively discussion, although time for discussion from the floor was limited by the embarrassment of riches provided by the speakers. Nonetheless, I think everyone who attended the conference came away with the sense of urgent questions being systematically addressed in ways that reflected a range of individual viewpoints and collective projects on the left. The conference brought together a wide range of people from the *Monthly Review* community, connected powerfully with the progressive community in Burlington, and helped to ensure that the values that inspired the work of Harry Magdoff live on.

Conference Videotapes

A three-tape set of the conference proceedings are available for \$50 plus \$5 postage. Checks should be made out to CCTV, 294 North Winooski Ave., Burlington, VT 05401; tel. (802) 862-1645 ext. 13.

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(LEFT TO RIGHT) AMIYA KUMAR BAGCHI, SAM GINDIN (HIDDEN), BARBARA EPSTEIN, AND BILL FLETCHER.

Man of the Hour

A biographical sketch of Harry Magdoff, the man Cornel West described as a “long distance runner for the cause of freedom in America.”

Harry Magdoff was born in the Bronx in 1913, of working-class parents — his father was a house painter. He attended CCNY, where he studied physics and math and was active in a left discussion group called the Social Problems Club, editing its monthly magazine *Frontiers*. In 1932 he went to Chicago to the founding national conventions of the National Students



HARRY AND BD IN 1932

League (he was already editor of the local NSL magazine *Student Review*) and the youth League Against the War and Fascism. It was during the convention that he married a fellow student, Beatrice Greizer (better known as Bd).

After a political confrontation with the CCNY administration, Harry was expelled and went to NYU, where he majored in economics. He got his degree in 1936. While at school he also taught Marxism to workers through the Jewish Workers' University.

In 1936 Magdoff went to Philadelphia to direct studies of the labor force, unemployment, industrial capacity, and productivity for the WPA's National Research Project. In 1940 he moved to Washington, D.C., where he was put in charge of the civilian requirements division of the National Defense Advisory Commission. When the United States entered the war in 1941, he was assigned the task of watching over the progress of war production for the War production board, and then put in charge of planning and controls for the crucial metalworking machinery industries. Toward the end of the war he became chief economist in charge of the Current business Analysis Division of the Department of Commerce, where, among his other duties, he oversaw the monthly publication of the Survey of Current business. His final years in government were

spent as special assistant to the Secretary of Commerce, Henry Wallace.

Beginning in 1948, however, Magdoff was subjected to inquiries by congressional committees and the FBI. He moved to New York and for the next ten years had to struggle to make a living. He worked as a stockbroker and as a financial analyst for an insurance company. He persuaded a firm to front for him in putting out a circular newsletter about the state of the economy which was sold to banks. He taught at the New School. In the mid-1950s he, along with (among others) Annette Rubinstein, Irving Kaplan, and Bd Magdoff, founded the Fund for Social Analysis, which raised money for scholarly studies in the area of Marxism. (It gave grants to such scholars as Gordon Lewis and Paul Baran.) In 1959, Harry joined Russell & Russell, a publisher of scholarly out-of-print books, where he remained until the company was bought in 1965.

He joined *Monthly Review* as co-editor in 1969. He has taught and lectured around the world, and, besides co-authoring a number of books with Paul M. Sweezy, is the author of *The Age of Imperialism* (1969) and *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* (1977).

At *Monthly Review*, Harry specialized in the analysis of economic statistics, and took a leading role in creating the remarkable series of analytical articles on the U.S.

and world economy that have appeared in *Monthly Review* over the last thirty-five years. Harry also undertook the greatest part of the magazine's correspondence with its authors and friends around the world. In the last decade, he has been the leading figure in carrying out the transition at *Monthly Review* to the new editors and directors now responsible for the enterprise.

In the year since the death of Bd in June 2002, Harry has lived in Burlington, Vermont, with his son Fred and daughter-in-law Amy. He continues, via the internet, to participate actively in editing the magazine. As he celebrates his ninetieth birthday, Harry can see the whole of enlightened global opinion come to adopt a view of U.S. imperialism that he has patiently, and most often in virtual isolation, been advancing for half a century.

Take a Break
With Harry and Paul!



The *Monthly Review* mug is here, featuring the caricatures of Harry and Paul. Made in England, these sturdy, oversize mugs are a terrific way to commemorate Harry's 90th birthday. \$12/U.S. or \$20/foreign, postage included.

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The Panelists

A brief introduction to the sixteen individuals who made presentations at the conference.

AMIYA KUMAR BAGCHI, a renowned economist and historian, is director of the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, and is the author of *Capital and Labour Redefined: India and the Third World* (Anthem, 2002), and *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

BERNARDINE DOHRN, a leading political activist in the United States in the period of the Vietnam war, teaches in the clinical program of Northwestern University Law School and is Director of the Children and Family Justice Center. She is a founder and member of the American Bar Association section of litigation's Children's Rights Committee.



ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ teaches at California State University-Hayward. She is a longtime activist and writer. In addition to many scholarly books and articles, she has published two historical memoirs, *Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie* (Verso, 1997), and *Outlaw Woman: Memoir of the War Years, 1960—1975* (City Lights, 2002), and is at work on a third, *Norther: Re-Covering Nicaragua*, about the 1980s contra war against the Sandinistas.



BARBARA EPSTEIN teaches in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California-Santa Cruz. Epstein teaches courses on theories of social movements and has written numerous articles critiquing post-structuralism and the academic star system that it is associated with. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Monthly Review Foundation.

BILL FLETCHER, formerly the education director for the AFL-CIO, is President of the TransAfrica Forum and co-chair of Uniting for Peace and Justice, the leading anti-war coalition in the United States. He is a mem-

ber of the Board of Directors of the Monthly Review Foundation.

JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER is co-editor of *Monthly Review* and teaches in the Sociology Department at the University of Oregon. He has written widely on political economy and environmental sociology, including *Marx's Ecology* (Monthly Review Press, 2000) and *Ecology Against Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press, 2002). He is President of the Monthly Review Foundation.

SAM GINDIN, economist and former Director of Research and Assistant to the President of the Canadian Auto Workers, teaches at York University in Toronto. He was the winner in 2001 of the first Daniel Singer Prize for his essay "Anti-Capitalism and the Terrain of Social Justice."

PETER GOWAN is an editor of the *New Left Review*, and professor of international relations at Metropolitan University in London. He has written on developments in Eastern Europe and on questions of international economic and political relations, notably *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (Verso Books, 1999).

MICHAEL KLARE teaches at Hampshire College and is Director of the Five College Program in Peace and World Security Studies. He currently serves on the board of directors of the Arms Control Association, the National Council of the Federation of American Scientists, and the advisory board of the Arms Division of Human Rights Watch. Professor Klare has written widely on U.S. defense policy, the arms trade, and world security affairs.



JOHN MAGE, an international lawyer and attorney in the U.S. to the Soviet union at the time of its collapse, has been counsel to Monthly Review Foundation for many years and is currently its vice-president and treasurer.

JANE KNODELL is chair of the department of economics at the University of Vermont, and has written extensively on U.S. economic history and monetary institutions. She is a member of the Burlington City Council.

ROBERT W. McCHESNEY is co-editor of *Monthly Review*, professor of communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a leading activist/critic of the U.S. media. McChesney is the author of *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (New Press, 2000) and writes widely for both academic and non-academic publications. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Monthly Review Foundation.

LEO PANITCH, co-editor of *The Socialist Register*, teaches in the political science department at York University. Professor Panitch has written extensively on working class politics, state theory, and political economy.



ELEANOR STEIN, a leading U.S. activist against the war in Vietnam, is today an administrative law judge. Judge Stein teaches telecommunications law at Albany Law School; and Women and the Law at the State University of New York.

WILLIAM K. TABB is professor of economics and political science at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is the author of numerous books and articles including *The Amoral Elephant: Globalization and the Struggle for Social Justice in the Twenty-First Century* (Monthly Review Press, 2001).



IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, among the leading theoreticians of history and society of our times, is Director of the Fernand Braudel Center, editor of *REVIEW*, and Senior Research Scholar at Yale University. He is the author of *The Modern World-System*, and the forthcoming (from New Press) *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World*.