#### “Free trade” is spread though the imperialism and the threat of force – it is an ideological justification for removing barriers to exploitation

Tabb 7(William, Department of Econ at Queens College, Monthly Review Vol. 58.10 March)

What drives capitalism is not some imaginary free market with its consumer sovereign but rather capital’s drive to accumulate. Imperialists seeking to exploit peoples and resources wherever they find vulnerable social formations make their calculation exclusive of the cost to their own nation’s treasury, except to the extent they themselves bear any burden of expenditure. The saturation of domestic markets and the drives to lower cost, find new sources of profit, and employ technological revolutions for accumulation purposes combine to drive capitalism outward. Trade was rarely initiated, as the economists’ model would have it, out of free consent for mutual advantage between core and periphery. In the early stages of imperialism—of plunder and piracy—this was self-evident and overseas expansion required a very different rationale. From a marxist view successful capitalism needs the national state to overcome internal barriers to the creation and smooth operation of its home market and to protect its traders’ and investors’ interests abroad in a world of rival states. So if the drive to expand and to encompass the world market is given in the nature of capitalism as Marx suggested, then imperialism is not an accident but integral to its operation and logic. The drive to compete does not presume, as the mainstream economists would have it, an ideal of perfect competition as the tendential norm and starting point of analysis, but the use of state power on the part of the strongest elements to intervene on behalf of their power to exploit and extort rules favorable to the greatest appropriation of surplus. As innovations in transportation and communication develop so does the capacity to more deeply penetrate other social formations. Those who take imperialism seriously think that the models mainstream economists construct underspecify and misspecify the way trade and growth are connected and incorporate assumptions (such as full employment of all resources in a competitive marketplace) that do not model actual capitalism’s character. As Patrick O’Brien writes “In order to measure the costs and benefits that might have arisen from a disembodied imperialism they have resorted to an analysis based upon an altogether unrealistic counterfactual; namely, an international economic order, operating between 1688 and 1815 under competitive conditions, virtually free from governmental interference with trade and untroubled by warfare.”8 Such counterfactual economic theory that presents “free trade” as the dominant reality even in the colonial era itself has then been used to argue that the burdens of colonies and the imperial military apparatus outweigh their benefits since free trade is more efficient and more beneficial to both parties. Counterfactual history is a difficult, if not in most instances an impossible, business. But it is not without interest that in 1820, according to Angus Maddison’s calculations, Asia generated 59 percent of global GDP (by purchasing power parity measure); in 1950 just 18 percent of world GDP.13 It is difficult to think that foreign intervention and conquest had nothing to do with this huge relative decline. When a post-Maoist government sought an opening to the West on its own terms, these disgraces were a vivid memory. Thus they desired a carefully calibrated economic policy that would allow them to control this process. Developmental states have found industrial policy can be used effectively as in Japan and Korea. The activities of the IMF and the WTO as directed by the countries of the core can be read as acting to prevent the possibility of state-led development, once practiced by the now developed economies. There continues to be a need for active interventionist policies to establish and maintain what has been called “free trade,” and military intervention and the threat of use of overwhelming force remain central tools of the imperialist project. Imperialism is a capacious category and its usage has stretched from control and rivalry over foreign markets to the face of conquest and regime change. The role of corporate and financial interests in removing obstacles to trade and investment is of course hardly absent in the current imperialist adventure in Iraq. An administration deeply entangled in oil and defense contracting has thus lied its way into what is proving a painful quagmire. The application of the Bush Doctrine has pushed to the background the framework which has guided the polices of his father’s administration and the Clinton White House—the expansion of U.S. power through the creation and modification of trade and investment relations on a global terrain. We are reminded by today’s events that imperialism is above all about defending and expanding global control. This involves two tactical avenues: military force and political governance. The two go together although not always in overt ways. Twenty-first-century imperialism is about neoliberal globalization. The regimes for trade, finance, and investment of the global economic governance institutions—the IMF, the WTO, and others—are nonetheless supplemented when imperialism believes it necessary by the old standby of military conquest and horrific violence. Washington’s arrogance of invasion and regime change, of naked imperialist ambition, is in our time a failure—in all but its ability to inflict horrendous cost on its victims. It has given rise to a vibrant antiwar movement and the dissatisfaction of tens of millions of Americans who have recently become more aware of the arrogance of imperialist power.