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Year 501: The Conquest Continues (Chomsky Perspectives)

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26 Highlight(s) | 0 Note(s)

Yellow highlight | Location: 306

Excessive liberalism apparently contributed to the collapse of the Spanish imperial system. It was too open, permitting “merchants, often non-Spanish, to operate in the entrails of its empire” and allowing “the benefits to pass through and out of Spain.” The Dutch, in contrast, kept the benefits “very firmly in the country,” while “indigenous merchants were the empire and were the state,” Pearson concludes. Britain pursued similar policies of economic nationalism, assigning rights to state-chartered monopolies, first (1581) for Turkey and the entire Middle East, then the rest of Asia and North America. In return for the grant of rights, the quasi-state companies provided regular payments to the Crown, an arrangement that would be replaced by more direct engagement of state power. As British trade and profit rapidly increased in the 18th century, government regulation remained important: “Less restrictions in the nineteenth century were a result of English dominance, not its cause,” Pearson observes.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 374

Under Britain’s Permanent Settlement of 1793 in India, land was privatized, yielding wealth to local clients and taxes for the British rulers, while “The settlement fashioned with great care and deliberation has to our painful knowledge subjected almost the whole of the lower classes to most grievous oppression,” a British enquiry commission concluded in 1832, commenting on yet another facet of the experiment. Three years later, the director of the Company reported that “The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India.” The experiment was not a total failure, however.

"If security was wanting against extensive popular tumult or revolution," the Governor-General of India, Lord Bentinck, observed, "I should say that the 'Permanent Settlement,' though a failure in many other respects and in most important essentials, has this great advantage, at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British Dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people," whose growing misery is therefore less of a problem than it might have been. As local industry declined, Bengal was converted to export agriculture, first indigo, then jute; Bangladesh produced over half the world's crop by 1900, but not a single mill for processing was ever built there under British rule.¹³ While Bengal was despoiled, Britain's textile industry was protected from Indian competition; a matter of importance, because Indian producers enjoyed a comparative advantage in printed cotton textile fabrics for the expanding market in England. A British Royal Industrial Commission of 1916-1918 recalled that Indian industrial development was "not inferior to that of the more advanced European nations" when "merchant adventurers from the West" arrived; it may even be "that the industries of India were far more advanced than those of the West up to the advent of the industrial revolution," Frederick Clairmonte observes," citing British studies. Parliamentary Acts of 1700 and 1720 forbade the import of printed fabrics from India, Persia, and China; all goods seized in contravention of this edict were to be confiscated, sold by auction, and re-exported. Indian calicoes were barred, including "any garment or apparel whatsoever...in or about any bed, chair cushion, window curtain, or any other sort of household stuff or furniture." Later, British taxes also discriminated against local cloth within India, which was forced to take inferior British textiles.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 398

By the 19th century, India was financing more than two-fifths of Britain's trade deficit, providing a market for British manufactures as well as troops for its colonial conquests and the opium that was the staple of its trade with China.¹⁴

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 815

The South is assigned a service role: to provide resources, cheap labor, markets, opportunities for investment and, lately, export of pollution.

For the past half-century, the US has shouldered the responsibility for protecting the interests of the "satisfied nations" whose power places them "above the rest," the "rich men dwelling at peace within their habitations" to whom "the government of the world must be entrusted," as Winston Churchill put the matter after World War II.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,360

Perhaps the most dramatic current examples of the cynical pursuit of the "vile maxim" in international trade are Washington pressures to force Third World countries to accept US exports of tobacco, the world champion killer among lethal narcotics by a substantial margin. The Bush Administration launched its hypocritical "drug war" (timed nicely to produce the proper mood for the invasion of Panama) simultaneously with steps to force Third World countries to import this leading killer, and to allow advertising aimed at new markets, women and children particularly. GATT backed these efforts. The media, while climbing aboard the "drug war" bandwagon with appropriate fanfare, obliged the Administration further by completely suppressing the major drug story of the day. There were no headlines reading "US Demands to be World's Leading Narcotrafficker," or even a line in the back pages (statistically insignificant dissidents aside).

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,378

Another story in the same issue illustrates how flexible an instrument economic doctrine can be. It celebrates the achievements of New Hampshire in dealing with its fiscal problems. The method was to encourage a successful enterprise that has become "the largest retail volume outlet for wine and liquor in the world, according to state officials," with \$62 million in profits from sales of over \$200 million in 1991, a \$5 million increase in profit in a year. The increase is attributed in part to doubling of the advertising budget for alcohol, which ranks second to tobacco as a killer. The enterprise is a state monopoly. Hence its profits allow the most conservative state in the union to keep to the free market doctrines its leaders revere and to avoid taxes that would rob the wealthy to enrich welfare mothers. Another free market triumph, unnoticed.⁴¹

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,384

In theory, free trade arrangements should lower wages in high-wage countries and raise them in the poorer areas to which capital shifts, increasing global equity. But under prevailing conditions, a different outcome is likely. The senior economist at the Environment Department of the World Bank, Herman Daly, points out that the vast and growing supply of underemployed people in the Third World will “keep the supply of labor very large, and will make it impossible for wages worldwide to be bid up very much.” Repression and terror lend their assistance. The outcome will be huge profits and chipping away at high wages and social gains, including laws against child labor, limits on working hours, and protection of the environment. “Anything that raises costs [is] going to tend to be competed down to the lowest common denominator in free international trade,” Daly predicts—precisely as intended.⁴²

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,629

What went on in Russia was not his concern, Truman declared. Stalin’s death would be a “real catastrophe,” he felt. But cooperation was contingent on the US getting its way 85 percent of the time, Truman made clear. Melvyn Leffler—who has examined the record in close detail and has much respect for the achievements and foresight of the early postwar leadership—remarks that “Truman liked” Stalin. He comments on the lack of any “sense of real compassion and/or moral fervor” in the documentary record. “These men were concerned primarily with power and self-interest, not with real people facing real problems in the world that had just gone through fifteen years of economic strife, Stalinist terror, and Nazi genocide.”⁸

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,635

The animating concern was not Stalin’s awesome crimes, but the apparent successes in development with their broad appeal, and the possibility that the Russians might be “flirting with the thought” of lending support to “aspirations of the common man” in the West, and subjugated and oppressed people everywhere. The failure of East Europe to resume its traditional role as a supplier of food and raw materials to the West compounded these concerns. The problem is not crimes, but insubordination, a fact illustrated by a host of gangsters from Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin to Saddam Hussein.

Though US planners did not expect a Soviet

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,652

In short, the USSR was not only guilty of ultranationalism and undermining “stability” through the rotten apple effect. It was committing yet another crime: interfering with US designs and helping the victims resist, an intolerable affront that few in the South could match, though Cuba did as it blocked US-backed South African aggression in Angola. Accordingly, there could be no accommodation, no détente. Even as the Soviet Union collapsed through the 1980s, the test of Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” put forth in the liberal press was his willingness to allow US violence to proceed without impediment; failing that criterion, his gestures are meaningless, more Communist aggressiveness.¹⁰

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,706

In a 1948 book, liberal activist Cord Meyer, an influential figure in the CIA, wrote that the right to strike must be “denied” if it is not voluntarily restricted, given “the urgency of [the] defense plans” required. And “citizens of the United States will have to accustom themselves to the ubiquitous presence of the powerful secret police needed for protection against sabotage and espionage.” As under Wilson, fascist methods are needed to guard against the threat to “stability.”

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,742

A striking example is the delusion that the Cold War was a struggle between socialism and capitalism. The Soviet Union, from 1917, has been even more remote from socialism than the US and its allies have been from capitalism, but again, both major propaganda systems have had a longstanding interest in claiming otherwise: the West, so as to defame socialism by associating it with Leninist tyranny, and the USSR, so as to gain what prestige it could by associating itself with socialist ideals—ideals whose force was powerful and wide-ranging. “I believe that socialism is the grandest theory ever presented, and I am sure some day it will rule the world,” Andrew Carnegie told the New York Times, and when it does, “we will have attained the millennium.”

To this day, almost half the population find the phrase “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” to be such an obvious truth that they attribute it to the US Constitution, a text largely unknown but taken to be akin to Holy Writ. The absurd association of Bolshevik tyranny with socialist freedom was doubtless reinforced by the accord between the two major doctrinal systems, though for intellectuals, the appeal of Lenin’s authoritarian deviation from the socialist tradition has deeper roots.¹⁹ By the early 1980s it was becoming impossible to sustain the illusion of Soviet power, and a few years later, it was laid to rest. 3.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,076

At the same time, the electoral campaign opened in Nicaragua. Its 1984 elections do not exist in US commentary. They could not be controlled, and therefore are not an inspiring example of democracy. Taking no chances with the long-scheduled 1990 elections, Bush announced as the campaign opened in November that the embargo would be lifted if his candidate won. The White House and Congress renewed their support for the contra forces in defiance of the Central American presidents, the World Court, and the United Nations, rendered irrelevant by the US veto. The media went along, continuing to suppress the US subversion of the peace process with the diligence required on important affairs of state. Nicaraguans were thus informed that only a vote for the US candidate would end the terror and illegal economic warfare. In Latin America, the electoral results were generally interpreted as a victory for George Bush, even by those who celebrated the outcome. In the United States, in contrast, the outcome was hailed as a “Victory for U.S. Fair Play,” with “Americans United in Joy,” Albanian-style, as New York Times headlines put it.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,141

The use of force to control the Third World is a last resort. Economic weapons are more efficient, when feasible. Some of the newer mechanisms can be seen in the GATT negotiations. Western powers call for liberalization when that is in their interest, and for enhanced protection when that is in their interest. One major US concern is the “new themes”: guarantees for “intellectual property rights,” such as patents and software, that will enable TNCs to monopolize new

technology; and removal of constraints on services and investment, which will undermine national development programs in the Third World and effectively place economic and social policy decisions in the hands of TNCs and the financial institutions of the North. These are “issues of greater magnitude” than the more publicized conflict over agricultural subsidies, according to William Brock, head of the Multilateral Trade Negotiations Coalition of major US corporations.⁴¹

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,149

In general, each of the wealthy industrial powers advocates a mixture of liberalization and protection (the Multifiber Arrangement and its extensions, the US-Japan semiconductor agreement, Voluntary Export Arrangements, etc.), designed for the interests of dominant domestic forces, and particularly for the TNCs that are to run the world economy. The effects would be to restrict Third World governments to a police function to control their working classes and superfluous population, while TNCs gain free access to their resources and monopolize new technology and global investment and production—and of course are granted the central planning, allocation, production, and distribution functions denied to governments, unacceptable agents because they might fall under the influence of popular pressures reflecting domestic needs. The outcome may be called “free trade” for doctrinal reasons, but it might more accurately be described as “a system of world economic governance with parameters defined by the unregulated market and rules administered by supranational banks and corporations” (Howard Wachtel), a system of “corporate mercantilism” (Peter Phillips), with managed commercial interactions within and among huge corporate groupings, and regular state intervention in the three major Northern blocs to subsidize and protect domestically-based international corporations and financial institutions.⁴² The facts have not been lost on Third World commentators, who have been protesting eloquently. But their voices are as welcome as those of Iraqi democrats.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 3,092

Sabotage, terror, and aggression were escalated further by the Kennedy Administration, along with the kind of economic warfare that no small country can long endure. Cuban reliance on the US as an export market and for imports had, of course, been overwhelming,

and could hardly be replaced without great cost. The New Frontiersmen were obsessed with Cuba from the first moments. During the presidential campaign of 1960, Kennedy had accused Eisenhower and Nixon of threatening US security by allowing "the Iron Curtain...90 miles off the coast of the United States." "We were hysterical about Castro at the time of the Bay of Pigs [April 1961] and thereafter," Defense Secretary Robert McNamara later testified to the Church Committee.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 3,098

few days before the decision to invade Cuba, Arthur Schlesinger advised the President that "the game would be up through a good deal of Latin America" if the US were to tolerate "another Cuba"; or this one, JFK determined. Much of Kennedy's Latin American policy was inspired by the fear that the virus would infect others and limit US hegemony in the region. At the first cabinet meeting after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, the atmosphere was "almost savage," Chester Bowles noted privately: "there was an almost frantic reaction for an action program." The President's public posture was no less militant: "the complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away with the debris of history. Only the strong... can possibly survive," he told the country. Kennedy broke all diplomatic, commercial, and financial ties with Cuba, a terrible blow to the Cuban economy, given the dependency that had been established under US suzerainty. He succeeded in isolating Cuba diplomatically, but efforts to organize collective action against it in 1961 were unsuccessful, perhaps because of a problem noted by a Mexican diplomat: "If we publicly declare that Cuba is a threat to our security, forty million Mexicans will die laughing." Fortunately, the educated classes in the United States were capable of a more sober evaluation of the threat posed to the survival of the Free World.¹⁰

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Yellow highlight | Location: 3,234

Worse yet, such perceptions are hardly unusual in the region itself, a product of direct experience and relative freedom from the rigid doctrinal requirements that constrain US orthodoxy and its European camp-followers. They are commonly articulated by leading figures. To select one poignant example, Father Ignacio Ellacuría, the rector of the Jesuit university of El Salvador (UCA), wrote in a Latin American

Church journal in November 1989 that for all its abuses, "the Cuban model has achieved the best satisfaction of basic needs in all of Latin America in a relatively short time," while "Latin America's actual situation points out prophetically the capitalist system's intrinsic malice and the ideological falsehood of the semblance of democracy that accompanies, legitimates, and cloaks it." It was for expressing such thoughts that he was assassinated by US-trained elite troops as the article appeared, and buried deep beneath shrouds of silence by those who feigned great indignation here.¹⁹

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 4,265

Phillips captured prevailing attitudes with accuracy, though some, like Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, found the Haitian elite rather amusing: "Dear me, think of it, Niggers speaking French," he remarked. The effective ruler of Haiti, Marine Colonel L.W.T. Waller, who arrived fresh from appalling atrocities in the conquest of the Philippines, was not amused: "they are real nigger and no mistake... real nigs beneath the surface," he said, rejecting any negotiations or other "bowing and scraping to these coons," particularly the educated Haitians for whom this bloodthirsty lout had a special hatred. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt, while never approaching the racist fanaticism and thuggery of his distant relative Theodore Roosevelt, shared the feelings of his colleagues. On a visit to occupied Haiti in 1917, he recorded in his diary a comment by his travelling companion, who later became the Occupation's leading civilian official. Fascinated by the Haitian Minister of Agriculture, he "couldn't help saying to myself," he told FDR, "that man would have brought \$1,500 at auction in New Orleans in 1860 for stud purposes." "Roosevelt appears to have relished the story," Schmidt notes, "and retold it to American Minister Norman Armour when he visited Haiti as President in 1934." The element of racism in policy formation should not be discounted, to the present day. Such thoughts were not unusual at the time of Wilson's intervention, not only in the United States. We may recall that shortly after, Winston Churchill authorized the use of chemical weapons "against recalcitrant Arabs as experiment," denouncing the "squeamishness" of those who objected to "using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes," mainly Kurds, a policy that he strongly favored, expecting that it "would spread a lively terror." For England itself, he had somewhat different plans. As Home Secretary in 1910 he had secretly proposed

sterilization of 100,000 “mental degenerates” and the dispatch of tens of thousands of others to state-run labor camps so as to save the “British race” from inevitable decline if its “inferior” members are allowed to breed ideas that were within the bounds of enlightened opinion of the day, but have been kept secret in Home Office files because of their sensitivity, particularly after they were taken up by Hitler.⁴

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 4,614

The assessment is plausible enough. That the US should have sought to establish “Duvalierism without Duvalier” could surprise only the willfully blind. For similar reasons, the Carter Administration sought desperately to institute “Somocismo without Somoza” after its efforts to salvage the tyrant collapsed, and its successor turned to more violent means to achieve the same end, with the general approval of enlightened opinion, tactical disagreement aside.²³ Superfluously perhaps, the priest’s assessment

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 4,870

In the years that followed, settlers encroached on Indian territory and new treaties were dictated, imposing further cessions of land. In what remained, a successful agricultural society was established, with textile manufacture from 1800, schools, printing presses, and a well-functioning government that was much admired by outsiders. A report submitted to the War Department in 1825 gave a “glowing description of the Cherokee country and nation at the time,” Helen Jackson writes in her exceptional (in many ways) 19th century history of Indian removal, quoting extensive passages of praise for the advanced civilization that the Cherokees had developed and the “republican principles” on which it was based. Meanwhile, the leading thinkers of Europe lectured on the strange lack of “psychic power” that caused the Indians to “vanish” and “expire as soon as Spirit approached” with the European presence.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 5,145

Regular military interventions ensured good behavior by the locals. In 1891, the USS Pensacola was dispatched “in order to guard American

interests," which now included ownership of four-fifths of the arable land. In January 1893, Queen Liliuokalani made a last ditch effort to preserve Hawaiian sovereignty, granting the right to vote in Hawaiian elections only to Hawaiians, rich or poor, without discrimination. At the order of US Minister John Stevens, US troops landed and imposed martial law—to support "the best citizens and nine-tenths of the property owners of the country," in the words of the commanding officer. Stevens informed the Secretary of State that "The Hawaiian pear is now fully ripe and this is the golden hour for the United States to pluck it." Long before, John Quincy Adams had used the same imagery with regard to the second of "the places of value," Cuba, a "ripe fruit" that would fall into our hands once the British deterrent is removed (see chapter 6). The US planters and their native collaborators

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 5,966

The 1892 confrontation at Homestead, commonly called "the Homestead strike," was actually a lockout by Carnegie and his manager on the scene, the thuggish Henry Clay Frick; Carnegie chose to vacation in Scotland, dedicating libraries he had donated. On July 1 the newly-formed Carnegie Steel Corporation announced that "No trade union will ever be recognized at the Homestead Steel Works hereafter." The locked-out workers could reapply individually, nothing more. It was to be "a Finish Fight against Organized Labor," the Pittsburgh press proclaimed, a fight "to the death between the Carnegie Steel Company, limited, with its \$25,000,000 capital, and the workmen of Homestead," the New York Times reported. Carnegie and Frick overcame the workers of Homestead by force, first sending Pinkerton guards, then the Pennsylvania National Guard when the Pinkertons were defeated and expelled by the local population. "The lockout crushed the largest trade union in America, the AAISW, and it wrecked the lives of its most devoted members," Paul Krause writes in his comprehensive history. Unionism was not revived in Homestead for 45 years. The impact was far broader. Destruction of unions was only one aspect of the general project of disciplining labor. Workers were to be deskilled, turned into pliable tools under the control of "scientific management." Management was particularly incensed that "the men ran the mill and the foreman had little authority" in Homestead, one official later said. As discussed earlier, it has been plausibly argued that the current malaise of US industry can be traced

in part to the success of the project of making working people “as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to be,” in defiance of Adam Smith’s warning that government must “take pains to prevent” this fate for the “labouring poor” as the “invisible hand” does its grim work (see pp. 25, 145). On the contrary, business called upon state power to accelerate the process. Elimination of the mechanisms “to consult our neighbor” is a companion process in the taming of the herd. Homestead

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 5,987

Carnegie’s victory at Homestead enabled him to slash wages, impose twelve-hour workdays, eliminate jobs, and gain monumental profits. This “magnificent record was to a great extent made possible by the company’s victory at Homestead,” a historian of the company wrote in 1903. Carnegie’s “free enterprise” achievements relied on more than the use of state violence to break the union. As in the case of other industries from textiles to electronics, state protection and public subsidy were critical to Carnegie’s success. “Under the beauties of the protective tariff system the manufacturing interests of the country are experiencing unparalleled prosperity,” the Pittsburgh Post reported on the eve of the lockout, while Carnegie and others like him were preparing “an enormous reduction in the wages of their men.” Carnegie was also a master swindler, defrauding the city of Pittsburgh in collusion with city bosses. Famed as a pacifist as well as philanthropist, Carnegie looked forward to “millions for us in armor” in construction of battleships—purely for defense, he explained, hence in accord with his pacifist principles. In 1890 Carnegie had won a large naval contract for his new Homestead plant. “It was with the help of...powerful politicians and crafty financiers who operated in the grand arenas of national and international government—as well as in the backrooms of Pittsburgh’s businesses and city hall—that Carnegie was able to construct his immense industrial fiefdom,” Krause writes: the world’s first billion-dollar corporation, US Steel. Meanwhile, the new imperial navy was “defending” the US off the coasts of Brazil and Chile and across the Pacific.¹⁷ The press gave overwhelming support to

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 6,015

The press was not alone in taking up the cudgels for the suffering

businessman. The highly respected Reverend Henry Ward Beecher denounced "the importation of the communistic and like European notions as abominations. Their notions and theories that the Government should be paternal and take care of the welfare of its subjects [sic] and provide them with labor, is un-American... God has intended the great to be great, and the little to be little." How much has changed over a century.¹⁸

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 6,023

Ten years later, John Fitch, who took part in a study of Homestead by urban sociologists, wrote that employees of the company refuse to talk to strangers, even in their homes. "They are suspicious of one another, of their neighbors, and of their friends." They "do not dare openly express their convictions," or "assemble and talk over affairs pertaining to their welfare as mill men." Many were discharged "for daring to attend a public meeting." A national union journal described Homestead as "the most despotic principality of them all" in 1919, when the 89-year-old Mother Jones was dragged "to their filthy jail for daring to speak in behalf of the enslaved steel workers," though some were later "allowed to speak for the first time in 28 years" in Homestead, Mother Jones recalled. So matters continued until the movements of the 1930s broke the barriers. The relation between popular organization and democracy is vividly illustrated in this record.¹⁹ We cannot really say that the current corporate

Note:
