

Expanding Empire Chapter 4: The meaning of Pacific power

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Keeping the question of economic expansion firmly in mind, and remembering the statements of Sen. Chauncey Depew and his fellow servants of big business about the Philippines and Asia in 1904, it is easier to understand why Lyndon Johnson on July 12, 1966, reaffirmed “the determination of the United States to meet our obligations as a Pacific power.”

To whom do “we” owe these “obligations”? To the puppet dictators whom “we” have installed in the western Pacific, on the fringes of Asia?

No, the “obligation” is the pledge of the American people to die for the profiteers and investors who have been making money in the western Pacific for generations and need to make constantly more money on an ever-ascending scale.

“We” have an “obligation” to protect the rights of those who draw rent, interest and profit from the soil of the Asian continent and the labor of the Asian people.

We are asked to die, not only for Ford, Chrysler and GM’s existing plants in Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, India, etc. Not only for Mobil Oil’s reserves in Indonesia, the Middle East, and its gas stations throughout the world. Not only for the First National City Bank, Chase Manhattan and Bank of America, which now truly dot the Eastern hemisphere as well as the Western.

We are asked to die not only for their existing investments, but also for their insatiable need for more, and still more.

U.S. President Lyndon Johnson is willing to burn all, kill all—women, children, babies—and of course “his” GIs too, to defend this “obligation.” And he is very, very clear on why this is and to whom the obligation is due.

Johnson, although not a professional economist, understands the economics of war much better than most of the economists do.

Johnson may never have worried very much about anything other than making money out of his government connections and his Texas construction, oil and aircraft company graft before he became President. But he is on a different level now, and he understands the importance of “Pacific power” because he now represents the combined interests of the ruling billionaires, who are primarily anxious to expand rather than to die.

Johnson may have formerly seen Asia as a repository for a small group of business interests, or as a chance for him to get a contract plum for his original sponsors—the Brown, Root Construction Co. of Texas, which, of course, now has huge contracts in Vietnam itself. But as president, regardless of any private financial peccadillos, he must advance the interests of the United States, which are the interests of the corporate owners and bankers of the United States. As a president loyal to the majority interest of the bankers he serves, he is determined at all costs to “hold on” in Asia, and if at all possible, expand into China.

That is why Johnson also said on the occasion of his “Pacific power” speech:

“Lasting peace can never come to Asia as long as the 700 million people of mainland China are isolated by their rulers from the outside world.”

The U.S. has surrounded China with bases and with the nuclear-armed Seventh Fleet, refused to recognize its government or allow it into the United Nations. To the extent that China is “isolated,” it is clear who has done the isolating.

The dollar and Henry Ford

But Johnson meant more than this. He meant that the U.S. would never willingly allow “lasting peace to come to Asia”—he meant that U.S. troops, arms and battleships are in Asia to stay—until the “isolation” from U.S. exploitation should be ended.

He was threatening in other words that the U.S. counter-revolution in Vietnam was a curtain raiser for a similar U.S. counter-revolution in China.

Under the cover of attacking “Communism,” he concealed what his less inhibited predecessors like Theodore Roosevelt used to reveal at every opportunity: namely, that China was necessary for “our” prosperity. Johnson wants to “open” China to the importation of U.S. capital and the exploitation by U.S. capitalists. He certainly wants to end its “isolation” from the U.S.-dominated part of the world and make it “peacefully” welcome the dollar and Henry Ford.

To do this, he and his advisers are even now seriously considering the possibilities of a much bigger war than Vietnam and soberly discussing air war, missiles, and other “contingency” methods of attack.

China is so important to the expansion of U.S. capital that the first Roosevelt even persuaded U.S. big business to invest in China before it considered the time ripe, even having private meetings with J.P. Morgan to get him to challenge British, Belgian and German economic hegemony in China! (This, by the way, is used by some learned persons as a proof that business itself was not interested in exploiting China.—*Sancta simplicitas*.)

Johnson was a little more careful during his Manila Conference last year. He didn’t talk so much about “Pacific power” and he tried to pose as just another conferee along with his Vietnamese, Philippine and other puppets. With Clark Air Field just 70

miles from his conference room and 20-odd U.S. bases in his “host” country, which, by the way, is now supposed to have its “freedom” from the U.S., it would have been quite unwise to breathe a public word about the U.S. expecting every Filipino to do his duty.

The idea of “Asians fighting Asians” is mostly a public relations job for the benefit of the United States public, anyway, rather than the Asian. It is almost exclusively the youth of the U.S. that will be called upon to take up arms for U.S. business. Not even the troops of those old exploiters of Asia—British, French and Dutch imperialism—are likely to be around for a strictly Asian slaughter.

Today, Britain, France, Holland and Germany, which all had big interests in Asia, have been either ousted by the masses or defeated by the U.S. or both. And Johnson’s problem is now to defeat the peoples themselves, rather than his rival groups of big business in Britain, Germany, etc. But his basic motives and needs—or rather the motives and needs of the big businesses he serves—are the same of those of the big businesses in the elder Roosevelt’s time. Only more urgent.

“The question now,” said Theodore Roosevelt shortly after the conquest of the Philippines, “is not whether we shall expand, for we have already expanded—but whether we shall contract. The Philippines are now part of American territory.”

There is infinitely more fear of “contraction” today, of course, than there was in Roosevelt’s time. “Expand or die” is a bold slogan for the youthful buccaneer. An old scrooge facing his inevitable, but unwelcome demise might personally settle for just being let alone. But when he is part of a system—a system that must expand or die—he cannot.