EXPANSION AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF POWER

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EXPANSION as a permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political idea of imperialism. As it signifies neither the temporary looting nor the more lasting incorporation of conquest, it is an entirely new concept in the long history of political thought and action. The reason for this surprising originality—surprising because in the field of politics entirely new concepts are extremely rare—is simply that this concept does not really belong in the realm of politics at all, but has its origin in the domain of business speculations, where expansion indicated the evergrowing body of industrial production and economic transactions characteristic of the nineteenth century.

Within the realm of economics, expansion was a good word because the growth of industrial capacity as it had been brought about through the industrial revolution was a working reality. Growth meant the increase of actual production, of goods to be used and consumed. The processes of production were as limited in themselves as is the capacity of man to produce, to establish, to furnish and to improve on the human world. If production and economic growth became limited, their limits were never economical themselves, strictly speaking, but political insofar as they depended upon the fact that the globe does not belong to one homogeneous population but is divided among and shared by many different peoples that are organized in widely differing bodies politic.

In contrast to the economic body, the body politic of any given people cannot be expanded indefinitely, because it is not
based upon the illimited productive capacity of man. Each community is, in its last analysis, the result of a decision, of a consent to live, to work and to function together. How many single individuals it can embrace and whether these belong to one or to different peoples, will depend upon its constitutional structure and, to a lesser degree, upon its economic capacity. Growth of this body politic beyond the limits of its territory had so far taken two forms: it was either conquest followed by incorporation; or it was colonization. In the latter case, the body politic was not expanded but transplanted; its result was the founding of a new people that ultimately would aspire to independence from the mother country though it may consent to retain some of the original ties with it or even form a new federated body on the basis of a common past and a common legal structure—as is the case of the British Commonwealth as opposed to the British Empire. But such a federated structure has again very definite limitations and cannot be stretched to people that do not share its fundamental realities. British statesmen who under the pressure of the war tried to expand the Commonwealth to the Empire by giving dominion status to India, met a flat refusal from Indian nationalists who were and are not interested in anything short of independence. This refusal on the other hand, must have been somehow a relief to England who would have experienced tremendous difficulties with the Commonwealth peoples, had she ever succeeded in bringing a non-British people into the concern. In the blunt words of the eminent South-African writer, Jan Disselboom: "Great Britain is merely a partner in the concern. . . all descended from the same closely allied stock. . . . Those parts of the Empire which are not inhabited by races of which this is true, were never partners in the concern. They were the private property of the predominant partner. . . . You can have the white dominions, or you can have the Dominion of India, but you cannot have both."
Here it becomes quite clear that the organizing power of a political body cannot be illimited because the genuine consent at its base cannot be stretched indefinitely. Only tyranny which does not ask for consent and therefore is unable to build up a political community of any kind may be expanded without regard to existing frontiers and differences of population. But then tyranny does not count with any communal let alone political body but, on the contrary, presupposes the destruction of all existing communal organizations and the ruthless transformation of all men into isolated individuals who have lost the very bonds which keep men together.

Expansion, the political brain child of the business-man in despair, was conceived as limitless and thought of as the leading new principle of the nation's foreign policy. A limit, in appearance only, occurred in the concept of "competing empires" which J. A. Hobson ("Imperialism", London 1905) thought to be the essential characteristic of modern imperialism as opposed to the "idea of empire in the ancient and medieval world (which) was that of a federation of States, under a hegemony, covering . . . the entire known recognized world." This concept of competition, however, is only one of the numerous remnants of nationalism in the first stages of the imperialist era; it was a concession to the still prevailing national principle that once had conceived of mankind as a family of nations vying with each other for excellence as well as to the liberals' belief in competition which was supposed to find automatically its stabilizing predetermined limits before one competitor had liquidated all others. This happy balance, however, had hardly been the necessary outcome of mysterious economic laws, but had relied heavily on political, and even more on police institutions that would prevent the competitors from using their revolvers. How a competition between fully armed business-concerns—"Empires"—could end in anything but victory for one and death for the others is difficult to perceive. In other words, competition is as
little a principle of politics as expansion, because it is safe only as long as it has no political power but is restrained and controlled by institutions of the body politic.

What expansion actually stood for was the expansion of political power without foundation of a body politic. For the first time, investment of power did not pave the way for investment of money; but export of power followed meekly the exported money because investment in foreign countries threatened to transform large strata of society into gamblers, to change the whole economic system from a system of production into a system of finance speculation and to replace the profits of production by the profits of commissions. The decade which immediately preceded the era of imperialism, the seventies of the last century, had seen an unparalleled increase of swindles, financial scandals and gambling in the stock-markets. The pioneers of this development which threatened to become a mass-movement had been the rather small group of nineteenth century financiers who had earned their wealth outside the pale of the producing capitalistic system and had been needed by as well as profiteered from the pressing needs of the growing national states for internationally guaranteed loans. With the firm establishment of the tax-system that provided for sounder finances of the governments, this group had every reason to fear complete extinction. Their wealth had become superfluous. As it was, this group was allowed to survive some more decades and even to get stronger temporarily, because the governments came to its assistance. After the financiers had opened the channels of capital-export to the superfluous wealth which had been condemned to idleness within the narrow framework of national production, it became clear at once that the absentee-shareholders did not care to take the tremendous risks which in the nature of things would have corresponded to their tremendously enlarged profits. Against these risks, the commission-earning financiers
had no power to assure them. Only the power of a state could achieve that.

To the various national governments it seemed as though the only alternative to the export of power would have been the deliberate renunciation of a great part of the national wealth. Only through the expansion of the national instruments of violence could the foreign investment movement become rationalized, could the wild speculations of the superfluous capital which had provoked the gambling of all saved money be re-integrated into the economic system of the nation. The State expanded its power because, put before the alternative of greater losses than the economic body of any country could have tolerated and of greater gains than any people left to its own devices would have dreamed of, it could but choose the latter.

It is true that export of government-power weakened considerably the position of the financiers, but it did not yet eliminate them. Since the majority of them were Jews and therefore without any official support, it was comparatively easy to put them into an inferior position. Very instructive in this respect are the business transactions of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa through which he, an absolute newcomer, could remove in a few years the then all-powerful Jewish financiers (Barnato, Alfred Beith) from first place.

The first consequence of the power export was that the state instruments of violence, such as police and army, which within the framework of the nation existed beside, and were controlled by other national institutions, became separated from this body and promoted to the rôle of representation of the nation in far away countries that were either uncivilized or weak. It was here, in backward regions without industries and political organization where violence could exercise a much greater power than in any Western country, that the so-called laws of capitalism actually were allowed to create realities. The empty desire of the bourgeoisie that money may beget money as men can beget
men had remained an ugly dream as long as this money had to go the long way of normal investment in production, so that in reality not money begot money but men made things and money. The secret of this happy fulfilment was precisely that economic laws were no longer allowed to function by themselves and that political institutions were no longer in the way of the greed of the owning classes. Money finally could beget money, because power with complete disregard to all laws—economical as well as ethical—could appropriate wealth. Only when the exported money had succeeded in stimulating the export of power, could it accomplish the designs of its owners. Only the illimited accumulation of power could bring about the illimited accumulation of capital.

Foreign investments, capital export which originally had been an emergency measure became a permanent feature of all economic systems as soon as it was protected by the export of power. The notion of expansion in the imperialistic sense (that is, as an end in itself and not as a temporary means) made its appearance in political thought when it had become obvious that one of the most important permanent functions of the national State would be expansion of power. The State-employed administrators of violence soon formed a new class within the nations and, although their field of activity was far away from the mother country, yielded an important influence on the body politic at home. Since they actually were nothing but functionaries of violence they could but think in terms of power-politics. They were the first who as a class and supported through their everyday experiences would claim that power lies at the base of every political structure.

The new feature of the imperialist political philosophy is not the predominant place it gave to violence, nor the discovery that power is one of the basic political realities. Violence has always been the last instance of political action and power has always been the visible expression of rule and government. But neither of them had ever been the conscious aim of the body politic or
the ultimate end of any definite policy. And this for the very simple reason that power left to itself can achieve nothing but more power and that violence administered for power's—and not for law's—sake turns at once into a destructive principle that will stop short at no impediment but will go on as long as there is anything left which has not yet been violated.

This nonsense, inherent in all consequent power-politics, however, takes on an appearance of sense if one understands it in the context of a supposed permanent process which has neither end nor aim but is end and aim in itself. Then the test of achievements indeed can become meaningless and power can be thought of as a never-ending, self-feeding motor of all political action that would correspond to the alleged unending permanent accumulation of money that begets money. The concept of unlimited expansion that alone can fulfill the hopes of unlimited accumulation of capital and brings about the aimless accumulation of power makes foundation of new political bodies—which up to the era of imperialism always had been the upshot of conquest—well-nigh impossible. On the contrary, its logical consequence is the destruction of all living communities, first those of the conquered peoples and finally that of the people at home. For every political structure, new or old, cannot but develop forces of stabilization which by themselves would become opposed to constant transformation and expansion. All political bodies appear therefore as temporary obstacles when they are seen in the light of an eternal stream of progressing power.

While the administrators of permanently increasing power in the past era of moderate imperialism did not even try to incorporate conquered territories and preserved existing backward political communities like empty ruins of by-gone life, their modern up-to-date colleagues were active in dissolving and destroying all political stabilized structures, their own as well as those of other peoples. The mere export of violence had made the servants into masters without giving them the master's prerogative
which is the possible creation of something new; the monopolizing concentration and tremendous accumulation of violence at home made the servants into active agents of destruction in whose hands expansion became a nation and people destroying force.

Power became the essence of political action and the center of political thought when it was separated from the political community which it should serve. This, it is true, had been brought about through an incident of economics; the resulting introduction of power as the only content of politics, and of expansion as its only aim, would hardly have met with so universal an applause, nor would the resulting dissolution of the body politic of the nation have met with so little opposition, had not this whole outlook so perfectly corresponded to hidden desires and secret convictions of the economically and socially dominant classes. The bourgeoisie that had been prevented from government for centuries by the national State and their own lack of interest in public affairs, was emancipated politically through imperialism.

II

Imperialism must be considered as the first stage of political rule of the bourgeoisie rather than as the last stage of capitalism. It is well known how little the owning classes had aspired to government, how well they had been contented with every type of state that could be trusted with protection of property-rights. For them, indeed, the state always had been but a well-organized police force.

This modesty, however, had had the curious consequence that the whole bourgeois class had remained in a sense outside the body politic; before being subjects in a monarchy or citizens in a republic, they were essentially private persons. In this privacy and mainly concerned with money-making, they had already developed a certain set of behavior-patterns which are expressed in all those proverbial advices of smartness—such as "nothing succeeds but success", "might is right", "right is expediency"
etc.—that necessarily spring from the experiences of a society of competitors.

When, in the era of imperialism, businessmen became politicians and were recognized as statesmen, while statesmen were taken seriously only if they talked the language of successful businessmen and "thought in continents", these well-known private practices and devices were gradually transformed into rules and principles for the conduct of public affairs. The significant fact about this process of revaluation that started at the end of the last, and is still in progress in the middle of our century, is that it began with the application of bourgeois convictions to the field of foreign affairs, that it only slowly backfired to domestic politics, and that, therefore, all peoples concerned were hardly aware that the recklessness which had prevailed in private life against which the public body had always to fight and defend itself was about to be promoted to the rank of the only publicly admitted political principle.

It is certainly no accident that the philosophy of power, as it has become predominant in the modern world, coincides and is in complete accordance with the philosophy of the only great thinker who ever attempted to derive public good from private interest and who, for the sake of private good, conceived and outlined a Commonwealth whose basis and ultimate end is accumulation of power. Hobbes, indeed, is the only one among the great philosophers to whom the bourgeoisie can rightly and exclusively lay claim. His Leviathan is the only political concept in which finally "the private interest is the same with the publique."

There is hardly a single instance of bourgeois morals and standards which has not been anticipated by the unequalled magnificence of Hobbes's logic. He gives an almost complete picture, not of Man, but of the bourgeois-man, an analysis which in three hundred years has neither been antiquated nor excelled. "Reason... is nothing but Reckoning", "A free Subject; a free Will... (are) words... without meaning; that is to say, Ab-
surd”; conscience in its moral significance is an illusion; “the Value, or Worth of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power”; honor has nothing to do with “whether an action . . . be just or unjust: for Honour consisteth onely in the opinion of power”; therefore, “Good fortune (if lasting) is Honourable” and bad luck dishonorable; all passions “may be reduced to the first, that is Desire of Power” and “Felicity of this life consisteth not in the desire from one object to another”; Life finally is “a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power that ceaseth only in Death.”

The important point of this picture is not at all its realistic pessimism for which it has much been praised in more recent times. For if it were true that man is such a being as Hobbes would like him to be, he would be unable to found any body politic at all. Hobbes, indeed, does not succeed and does not even want to succeed in incorporating this being definitely into any political community. Hobbes’s Man owes no loyalty to his country when this has been defeated and he is excused for every treachery if he happens to be taken prisoner. Those who live outside the pale of the Commonwealth (as for instance slaves) have no further obligation against their fellow-men, but are permitted to kill as many as they can; while, on the contrary, “to resist the Sword of the Commonwealth in defence of another man, guilty or innocent, no man hath Liberty”; which means that there is neither fellowship nor any responsibility between man and man. What holds together is a common interest which may be “some Capitall crime, for which every one of them expecteth death,”; in this case they have the right to “resist the Sword of the Commonwealth,” to “joyn together, and assist, and defend one another. . . . For they but defend their lives.”

The foregoing shows clearly that the membership of men in any form of community is held to be a temporary and limited affair which essentially does not change the solitary and private
character of the individual (who has "no pleasure, but on the contrary a great deale of griefe in keeping company, where there is no power to over-awe them all") nor create any permanent bonds between him and his fellowmen. It seems as though the very picture of man as given by Hobbes defeats his purpose of providing the basis for a Commonwealth and, instead, depicts a consistent pattern of attitudes through which every genuine community can easily be destroyed. This results in the inherent and admitted instability of Hobbes' Commonwealth whose very concept includes its own dissolution—"when in a warre (forraign, or intestine,) the enemies get a final Victory . . . then is the Commonwealth dissolved, and every man at liberty to protect himselfe"—an instability that is all the more striking as Hobbes' primary and frequently repeated aim was to secure a maximum of safety and stability.

One would do a grave injustice to Hobbes and his dignity as a philosopher if one were to consider this picture of man as an attempt at realism in psychology or at truth in philosophy. The point is rather that Hobbes in his political philosophy is not primarily concerned with man at all, neither in his nature nor in his psychology. He is interested exclusively in the political structure itself and depicts the features of man according to the needs of the Leviathan. For argument's and for conviction's sake, he presents his political outline as though he started from a realistic insight into man, a being that "desires power after power," and as though he proceeded from this insight to a plan for a body politic best fitting for this power-thirsty being. The actual logical process, i.e. the process in which alone his concept of man makes sense and goes beyond the obvious banality of an assumed human wickedness, is precisely the opposite.

It would be equally erroneous to take at its face value the obvious inconsistency between Hobbes' plea for security of the individual and stability of the commonwealth on the one side, and the inherent instability of his Leviathan on the other. Here
again he tries to persuade, to appeal to certain basic instincts which he knew well enough could survive in the subjects of the *Leviathan* only in the form of absolute submission to the power which "over-awes them all," that is in an all-pervading, overwhelming fear—not exactly the basic sentiment of a safe man. What Hobbes actually starts from is an unmatched recognition of the then new social body of the rising bourgeoisie, its inherent laws of unending acquisition, its underlying convictions of an unending process of growing property; his philosophy becomes outstanding because he draws the necessary conclusions from this state of economic affairs to revolutionary changes in the state of political affairs. What he proceeds to is a blueprint of a body politic which alone would be capable of fulfilling the new needs and safeguarding the interests of this class. And what he actually ends up with is a picture of man as he ought to become and ought to behave if he wants to fit into the coming bourgeois society.

Hobbes' insistence on power as the motor of all things human and divine (even God's reign over men is "derived not from Creating them . . . but from his Irresistible Power") springs from the theoretically indisputable conclusion that a never-ending process of growing property must be based on a never-ending process of growing power, that the accumulation of capital is limitless only if it is embodied in a political structure of "unlimited a Power" that can assume the necessary task of protecting a corresponding accumulation of property. Granted the fundamental dynamism of the new social class, it is perfectly true that "he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath at present, without the acquisition of more." The consistency of this conclusion is in no way altered by the remarkable fact that for some hundred years there was neither a sovereign who would "convert this Truth of Speculation into the Utility of Practice," nor a bourgeoisie that was politically conscious enough to adopt openly Hobbes’ philosophy of power.
This want of success that ironically enough befell the great idolater of Success was partially due to the revolutionary implications of the *Leviathan* which Hobbes did not hesitate to point out. Within a machinery whose only purpose is the generation and accumulation of power, every man and every thought which does not serve it and does not conform to the ultimate purpose is a dangerous nuisance. The books of the “ancient Greeks and Romans” become as “prejudicial” as the teaching of a “Summum bonum . . . as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers” or the doctrine that “whatsoever a man does against his Conscience, is Sinne” and that “Lawes are the Rules of Just and Unjust.” This violent distrust of all Western traditions of political thought is extremely justified if it is borne in mind that Hobbes wanted nothing more or less than the justification of Tyranny which, though occurring numerous times in Western history, never has been honored with a philosophical fundament. That the *Leviathan* actually amounts to a permanent government of tyranny, Hobbes makes quite clear in his final remarks where he states that “the name of Tyranny signifieth nothing more nor lesse than the name of Soveraignt . . . ; I think the toleration of a professed hatred of Tyranny, is a Toleration of hatred to Commonwealth in generall . . .”

The odd inconsistency between the power-thirsty animal-man who appears in the introductory chapter of the *Leviathan* and the poor little fellow who is not even given the right to rise against tyranny and who, far from striving for power, submits to any existing government, as he appears after the completion of the *Leviathan*, is inconsistency only in appearance. For a Commonwealth which is based on the accumulated and monopolized power of all its individual members necessarily leaves each person powerless, deprived of his natural and human capacities. He is degraded to the function of a mere cog in the power-accumulating machine which itself is constructed in such a way that it can devour the globe by only following its own inherent law. As
the power basis of the *Leviathan* was "justified" through psychological explanations on the desires of man, so its ultimate destructive purpose is at least indicated in the philosophical interpretation of human equality, which is an "equality of ability" to kill.

It certainly is true that power, freed from any other purpose but itself, is a dynamic, self-moving principle that must generate more power indefinitely if only for the purpose of conserving the acquired power. A Commonwealth based on it, may actually grow and expand indefinitely, as long as it is not checked by a second power-generating Commonwealth. With the latter, it lives anyhow "in the condition of a perpetuall war, and upon the confines of battle, with their frontiers armed, and canons planted against their neighbours round about." Such a check can be but temporary, for the Commonwealth that creates more power more quickly and "has an absolute Libertie, to doe what it shall judge . . . most conducing to (its) benefit" will devour the weaker structure until it comes to a last war "which provideth for every man, by Victory, or Death."

The *Leviathan*, therefore, is the only State that can overcome all political limitations which are given with the existence of other peoples and its natural end coincides with the limits of the earth. These limits, however, are serious to the point of defeating the whole structure. For if the neverending process of power-generation of the last victorious Commonwealth on earth cannot proceed to "annex the planets" (Cecil Rhodes), it can only proceed to destroy itself—in order to begin anew the never-ending process of power-generation.

This concept loses a good deal of its madness when it is reduced to its original purpose. This was not idle impractical speculation about new political principles nor the old search for reason as governing the community of men, but "reckoning of the consequences" that follow from the rise of a new class in society whose existence was essentially tied up with property as a dy-
namic, new property producing device. The so-called accumulation of capital which had given birth to the bourgeoisie had changed the very conception of property and wealth. These were no longer considered as the results of accumulation and acquisition but as their beginnings; wealth became identical with a never-ending process of becoming wealthier and wealthier. The classification of the bourgeoisie as belonging to the owning classes is only superficially right for it has been the characteristic of this class that everybody could belong to it who conceived of life as a process of becoming wealthier and wealthier, and who considered money as something sacrosanct that under no circumstances was a mere commodity for consumption.

Property-owners who do not consume but strive to enlarge their holdings continually find one very inconvenient limitation in human nature, and that is the unfortunate fact that men must die. Death actually is the true reason why acquisition can never become a true principle. Human condition restrains ownership to the actual needs of life—however small or great these needs may be. The limitation of personal life is as serious a challenge to property as fundament of society as the limitation of the globe is a challenge to power as the fundament of politics. By transcending the limits of human life in planning for an automatic continual growth of wealth, property of individuals is made a public affair and taken out of the sphere of mere private life. Private interests that by their very nature are temporary, limited by man’s natural span of life, can now escape into the sphere of public affairs and borrow from them an infinite length of time. This seems to create a state of society very similar to that among ants and bees where “the Common good differeth not from the Private; and being by nature enclined to their private, they procure thereby the common benefit.”

Since, however, men are neither ants nor bees, the whole thing is a delusion. Public life takes on the deceptive aspect of a sum total of private interests as though these through sheer
addition could create a new quality. All the so-called liberal concepts of politics, such as illimited competition regulated by a secret order of balance which springs mysteriously from the sum total of competing activities, the pursuit of "enlightened self-interest" as sufficient political virtue, illimited progress inherent in the mere succession of events, have this in common—that they simply add up private lives and personal behavior patterns and present this addition as laws of history or economics or politics. Liberal concepts, however, while they express the bourgeoisie's instinctive distrust for the body politic and his innate hostility to public affairs, are only a temporary compromise between the faith of the new class in property as a dynamic, self-moving principle and the old standards of Western culture. They give way to the extent that automatically growing wealth actually replaces political action.

Hobbes, because he was a philosopher, could detect the new aspects in the rise of the bourgeoisie and undertake to plan for a political structure that would be equal to the task of protecting the new type of property. He realized at once—what the bourgeoisie realized only after three hundred years of varying experiences and then almost accidentally—that acquisition of wealth considered as a never-ending process can be guaranteed only through size of political power, because the accumulating process of acquisition must sooner or later force open all existing territorial limits. He foresaw that a society which had entered the path of never-ending acquisition had to engineer a dynamic political organization capable of a corresponding never-ending process of power-generation.