

Views of Imperialism

J.A. Hobson, Imperialism (1902)

“For Europe to rule Asia by force for purposes of gain, and to justify that rule by the pretence that she is civilizing Asia and raising her to a higher level of spiritual life, will be adjudged by history, perhaps, to be the crowning wrong and folly of imperialism. What Asia has to give, her priceless stores of wisdom garnered from her experience of ages, we refuse to take; the much or little which we could give we spoil by the brutal manner of our giving. This is what imperialism has done, and is doing, for Asia.”

1. Does Hobson condone or condemn Western imperialism in Asia? Explain.

2. Imagine that you are a Westerner reading this excerpt at the turn of the last century. Would you be for or against imperialism? Explain.

INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, 2ND EDITION

“Among Lenin’s most influential theoretical contributions is his analysis of imperialism and war. Drawing on the work of the British economist J. A. Hobson (1858-1940), Lenin argued in *Imperialism: The Latest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) that the imperialist expansion by the world’s major powers in the late nineteenth century was an outgrowth of the development of monopoly capitalism, in which economic power in the advanced countries is increasingly concentrated in a relatively small number of large firms, industrial capital merges with big banks, and there is growing integration of private companies and the state. Competition between capitals for markets thus gives rise, on Lenin’s account, to military and territorial competition between nation states, which he viewed as the underlying explanation of the world war that broke out in 1914. On this analysis, rivalries and wars between major powers are rooted in the dynamic of capitalist development itself, and can only be eliminated by radically restructuring the economic system and replacing capitalism with socialism.”

3. Analyze Lenin. How would his background influence his views regarding imperialism?

4. COMPARISON: In what ways do Hobson and Lenin compare? Differ?