

to the Canadian ruling class. Thanks to Reinhold Kramer, Tom Mitchell and Daniel Francis we now have a much richer understanding of that moment, and students of the history of the Canadian left have been given renewed impetus to explore one of the defining moments of Canadian history.

Gordon, Todd. 2010. *Imperialist Canada*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring. ISBN 978-1-894037-45-7. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 432.

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It is not uncommon to analyze the world system using the category of imperialism. It is unusual to associate Canada with the term. By putting the two together in his book *Imperialist Canada*, Toronto author Todd Gordon has provided us with a compelling and important analysis of Canada's place in the world system.

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There is an older literature which "portrayed Canada as a subordinate nation with little or no imperial ambition of its own and dominated first by Britain and then the United States" (9). This left-nationalist or dependency school of political economy, nearly-hegemonic in left-analysis in the 1960s and 1970s, conceptualized Canada, not as imperialist, but as the victim of empire. In a short introduction, Gordon surveys the emerging literature which challenges this "dependency" analysis, insisting by contrast "that Canada is an imperialist country – not a super-power, but a power that nevertheless benefits from and actively participates in the global system of domination in which the wealth and resources of the Third World are systematically plundered by capital of the Global North" (9).

Gordon roots this understanding of Canada in a particular understanding of the dynamics of the world system. If states are the agents of empire, their aggressive push abroad cannot be separated from the dynamics of capital accumulation. The state "should be considered as internally related to market relations" (33) and those market relations continually lead to recurring crises of overaccumulation. A partial fix for these crises of overaccumulation – a "spatial fix" – is characteristic of imperialism. "New geographical regions are sought to absorb the existing surpluses of capital ... flagging profitability can be improved by accessing

cheap labour, raw materials and natural resources ... In effect, fresh spaces of wealth accumulation are established as capitalism penetrates new territories" (32). Imperialism might be carried out by institutions of the state, but its dynamics are not reducible to state policies. The actions of imperialist states are deeply rooted in the dynamics of capitalist market relations – Canadian capitalism as much as any other Global North country. Crucially for Canada, Gordon argues, this means that its actions abroad cannot be seen as "the result of pressures from the Americans and increased integration with them ... Canadian capital is still an independent force, however much its interests often coincide with its American counterpart" (14-15).

Importantly, Gordon does not begin his analysis "externally" but rather looks at the very construction of the Canadian state itself. The second chapter is a riveting account of "empire at home," documenting in grim detail the conquest of indigenous lands which laid the foundation for what is today Canada. "The whole foundation of Canadian capitalism rests upon indigenous land and resources" he writes, "Canada's existence is premised on the forceful subjugation of indigenous nations and their resources to its interests" (67). In an analysis influenced by David Harvey's notion of accumulation by dispossession, Gordon puts Canadian mining interests at the centre of this analysis. "Canada has the largest concentration of mining companies in the world, with interests in over 3700 properties" (81). This makes the dispossession of indigenous lands a central focus for Canadian capitalism, as "approximately 1,200 indigenous communities are located within 200 kilometres of an active mine" (82).

This analysis of Canadian state formation provides an indispensable foundation for Gordon when his analysis turns abroad. "Although separated spatially from the domestic agenda, the international imperial agenda is not an entirely different project; it is a continuation of the former, both geographically and historically" (134). In part, this reflects similar commercial interests to that of the mining corporations seeking profits on indigenous lands in Canada. There is quite a long history of Canadian banks in the Caribbean and "mining corporations such as the International Nickel Company's (Inco)" operating in Indonesia, Guatemala and elsewhere, profiting from the exploitation of natural resources through repressing the rights and interests of local populations (135).

But Canada's role abroad is not reducible to these straightforward commercial interests. Canada is a full partner in the complex architecture of Structural Adjustment policies and their "well-documented devastating impact on the Third World" (142). These policies were overseen by

international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, institutions in which Canada has “ played an important role ... By the late 80s structural adjustment was strongly endorsed and advocated by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the departments of Finance and External (now Foreign) Affairs as part of an effort to facilitate the expansion of Canadian economic interests in the wake of the profitability squeeze of the 1970s and 80s” (142).

Trade deals have always played a large role in analyses of Canada’s place in the world system. But whereas the left-nationalist literature has focused on trade deals as mechanisms which victimize Canada, Gordon by contrast develops an analysis which sees Canadian state and business interests as pushing “free trade” deals to further their own class and national interests. In the wake of the growing difficulties with a multilateral approach – whether through the collapse of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) or the impasse of negotiations at the level of the World Trade Organization (WTO) – it is well-known that the United States, the world’s principal imperialist power, has shifted to “bilateral” trade deals as mechanisms through which to advance a neoliberal agenda. But this has also been a track pursued by Canada which, as of the summer of 2010, “had enacted seven trade agreements and concluded deals with Jordan and Panama” (153).

Canada’s push abroad has clear economic motives. But is that sufficient to label Canada “imperialist?” Gordon addresses this issue directly. “Any country with imperial ambitions backs up its dreams of global power with some degree of military might” and “Today, the United States ... has built up the most powerful military in human history. That military is a key feature of the American imperial project. But what about the Canadian military?” (276). Gordon demonstrates that, even though it is not as militarized a society as the US, Canada nonetheless has a clear military component to its imperial projects.

He structures this analysis, again, looking first “internally” and then externally. There is a long history of enforcing Canadian colonial ambitions internally through the use of the military against First Nations. This is of a piece, Gordon argues, with the increasing turn to the use of force by the Canadian military abroad. His book joins a growing contemporary literature challenging the “peacekeeping” image of Canada abroad, analyzing Canada’s role in the coup in Haiti in 2004, its part in the “re-engineering” of Afghanistan from 2001 on and its close alliance with the

right-wing government in Colombia, all as foreign policy moments, seen most clearly through an “imperialist Canada” lens (326-398).

This book makes a real contribution to a necessary reconceptualization of Canada’s place in the world system, a necessity imposed by the actions of the Canadian state and Canadian corporations both at home and abroad. Future writings will be needed to fill in areas not covered in the book – most importantly to do with the complex relationship between Quebec and English Canada. Gordon documents the state-sanctioned execution of Métis leader Louis Riel in 1885 (77). There is a reason that Canada’s prime minister of the day, Sir John A. Macdonald, famously said, about Riel: “he shall hang though every dog in Quebec bark in his favour.” The one part of the country where Métis resistance found mass sympathy was in Quebec, a nation with its own deep grievances against the Canadian state. Integrating Quebec into our understanding of imperialist Canada remains an important task for activists today.

It is for activists that he writes his conclusion. “[A]s imperialism is the product of the contradictory dynamics of capitalist accumulation, it will not disappear of its own accord. We must build an anti-imperialist resistance” (403). Gordon sees *Imperialist Canada* as both a contribution to a theoretical debate and a potential resource for the movement activists “organizing against Canada’s reactionary role” in Haiti, “organizing against the war in Afghanistan and Canadian support for Israel, raising awareness about Canadian mining and sweatshop manufacturing, working in international solidarity committees in unions, challenging racist immigration policy and building support for First Nation struggles.” Without a doubt *Imperialist Canada* will be just such a resource for these “early rumblings of a new Canadian anti-imperialist politics” (405).