

terrorized and killed tens of thousands of trade unionists, workers, peasants, clergy, students, and other persons who have offered resistance to the oppressive social orders of those countries.

Nor do the benefits of this empire trickle down to the American consumer, as is often supposed. The radios assembled by women in Taiwan who work for twenty cents an hour, ten hours a day, six or seven days a week, do not cost much less than the transistors assembled in Ohio. Companies do not move to Taiwan in hope of saving money for the consumer, but to increase their own profits. They pay as little as they can in wages but still charge as much as they can in prices. That is why the returns on overseas investments are so much greater than on domestic investments.

The billions expended by the U.S. in non-military aid to other nations show a similar pattern, benefitting the overseas corporate investors, ruling oligarchs, generals, and big landowners, while offering little to the masses of the Third World. As someone once said, foreign aid is a matter of taking money from the poor people of a rich country and giving it to the rich people of a poor country.

The multinationals also cause a great deal of economic misery in the Third World — some of which comes home as a visitation upon our own people. Native lands are expropriated by agribusiness, for example, so that cash crops may be raised for export to more lucrative markets abroad, thus dispossessing the local peasantry. This has been the pattern throughout Latin America, with its teeming shantytowns and relatively empty countryside. Millions of destitute Latinos have been compelled to migrate to the United States, many of them illegally, to compete with American workers for low-income jobs that are becoming increasingly scarce. In effect, they



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have become a reserve army of labor helping to deflate wages at a further cost to American workers.

There are other ways Americans pay for "our" military-industrial empire. There is the distortion of an entire civilization's technology and science as two-thirds of all research and devel-

opment is controlled by the Pentagon. Small wonder we seem able to plan for monster science fiction wars in outer space while our trains are inferior to those we had forty years ago.

Americans pay for their empire with the cutbacks of vital human services, the neglect of environmental needs, the decay and financial collapse of our cities, the deterioration of our transportation, education, and health-care systems, and the devastating inflation that is inevitable when hundreds of billions of dollars are spent each year to produce and maintain a military colossus.

And on top of these are the frightful social and psychological costs, the discouragement and decline of public morale, the growing anger, cynicism, and suffering of the poor and the not-so-poor, and the threatened imposition of authoritarian solutions.

As in Rome of old and in every empire since, the center is bled in order to fortify the periphery. The treasure of the people is squandered so that patricians can pursue their far-off plunder. We suffer decay at home in order to better provide for "our" expanding global interests. It is a world made by and for the Pentagon and the multinational corporations.

What the military-industrialists fail to see is that the pyramid of power and profit they build rests on a crumbling base. Ultimately, no political-economic order can remain secure by victimizing its own people. Sooner or later, this truth returns to haunt the mighty.

Michael Parenti is a fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and the author of "Power and the Powerless" and "Democracy for the Few." The High Cost of Empire has been reprinted from The Progressive.

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