

U.S./Saudi Axis of Evil

Imperialist-Backed Slaughter in Yemen



Sipa (inset); Reuters

Child rescued after Saudi-led air strike in Yemeni capital Sana'a in August killed eight of her family members. Inset: President Trump with Saudi King Salman in Riyadh, May 2017.

For nearly three years, the rulers of Saudi Arabia, aided by the U.S. and Britain, have carried out a relentless war of annihilation in Yemen. Aerial assaults have laid much of what was already the poorest Arab country to waste. Targeting vital infrastructure, airstrikes have destroyed roads, electric grids, seaports, airports, bridges, water supply facilities, schools and hospitals. Along with the bombing campaign, a naval blockade enforced with the support of U.S. warships was imposed, virtually sealing off aid to Yemen, which relies heavily on imports for food, fuel and other necessities.

By conservative estimates, the Saudi-led campaign, which also involves the United Arab Emirates and other states in the region, has killed more than 13,000 people. Tens of thousands have been wounded and over three million displaced. Today, eight million people—nearly one third of the population—teeter on the brink of famine. According to UNICEF, a child dies in Yemen every ten minutes due to malnutrition and disease. With the collapse of health care and basic sanitation, including clean water, one of the largest and fastest-spreading cholera outbreaks in world history has raged uncontrollably. One million people have contracted the disease; more than 2,000 have perished.

Saudi Arabia has deliberately targeted the country's tiny agricultural sector, aiming to destroy food production and distribution by bombing farms, food storage facilities, marketplaces and food trucks. More than 250 fishing boats have been damaged or destroyed, and over 150 fishermen have been killed by helicopters and warships in the Red Sea.

Saudi Arabia and its allies began the bombing campaign in March 2015 after the Houthi movement, which is based on Yemen's Zaidi Shia Muslim minority, overran the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, and took control of a sizable swath of the country. The Saudi monarchy and its apologists claim that the war was launched in response to Iran, which they accuse, with no evidence, of funding and arming the Houthis. For the Saudi rulers—self-appointed guardians of Sunni Islam—the Persian-dominated Shia theocracy in Iran is a historical and ethnic foe.

For Washington, Saudi Arabia, along with Israel, has long been a key ally in enforcing U.S. imperialist interests in the Near East. Its importance increased particularly after the ouster of the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran by the 1979 "Islamic revolution." The Saudi monarchy, one of the world's biggest importers of advanced U.S. and British weapons systems, plays a critical role in propping up other oil-rich Gulf kingdoms and emirates and financially sustaining key U.S. client states such as Egypt.

As Marxists, we took no side in the tribal and religious conflicts that plagued

Yemen for many years, including the fighting between the Houthis and their rivals. But once the U.S.-backed Saudi war was launched, we underlined that it was in the vital interest of the international proletariat, not least in the U.S., to stand for the military defense of the Houthi forces and their allies, without giving this movement any political support. (For more on the background to the conflict, see "Down With Saudi-Led War in Yemen!" WV No. 1070, 12 June 2015.)

A setback for Saudi forces would not only give a black eye to this deeply reactionary, theocratic state; it would also hinder the ambitions of the U.S. imperialists, whose interventions into the Near East, especially since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, have wreaked mass death and destruction. Such slaughter is endemic to the capitalist system in its imperialist epoch, in which the advanced capitalist powers in North

America, West Europe and Japan have thrown the planet into a series of wars and occupations, including wars against each other, in order to dominate the globe. ***U.S. and all other imperialist forces out of the Near East now!***

Yemen has for years been a target of U.S. machinations in the Near East. In the name of combating the local Al Qaeda franchise, the Obama administration launched ever more drone attacks, which killed scores of civilians (as well as U.S. citizens targeted for assassination, like Anwar al-Awlaki and his 16-year-old son). Following in Obama's footsteps, Donald Trump, in one of his first acts as U.S. Commander-in-Chief, launched a Navy SEAL raid on a Yemeni village that killed some 30 civilians. He has also jacked up the number of drone strikes.

The U.S. has backed the Saudi-led war
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Yemen...

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in Yemen with bombs, precision-guided munitions and in-flight fueling and by identifying targets. Overall, the Obama administration supplied Saudi Arabia with more than \$115 billion in weapons and other military equipment, the most of any administration in the 71-year U.S.-Saudi alliance. Trump’s first trip abroad was to Saudi Arabia, where he signed a \$110 billion weapons deal. For their part, the British imperialists have sold the Saudis billions worth of fighter jets and military hardware while also providing training to Saudi pilots.

Named after the ruling Saud family, Saudi Arabia is a brutally oppressive state that enforces the extreme Wahabi variant of Sunni fundamentalism, from which the reactionary Islamic State (ISIS) derives its ideology. The House of Saud enjoys its obscene wealth, based on the country’s enormous oil resources, by viciously exploiting foreign migrant laborers, who are treated little better than slaves and are deported once their labor is no longer needed. Notwithstanding recent “reforms,” women are essentially regarded as property, possessing few rights and risking death by stoning for adultery. As for beheadings, crucifixions and other barbaric practices, the Saudi kingdom does not take a backseat to ISIS, having



May 2017: Young girl infected with cholera lies on floor of hospital in Hodeidah, Yemen. U.S.-backed war has resulted in one of the largest outbreaks of cholera in world history.

condemned hundreds to death by such means in recent years for blasphemy, apostasy, homosexuality and sorcery. Like ISIS, which obliterated historic temples and archaeological sites in Iraq and Syria, the Saudis have bombarded ancient monuments in Yemen, including the Marib Dam, an engineering marvel built during the Sabaean Kingdom in the first millennium B.C.

The architect of the war in Yemen is Saudi Arabia’s current Crown Prince,

Mohammed bin Salman, who became de facto leader of the country last year. While he promised a quick victory, the Houthis remain entrenched despite mass devastation inflicted on the populace. When former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had allied with the Houthis, broke with them and made overtures toward the Saudis for a deal, Houthi forces assassinated him.

The background to the war is the arch rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran over influence in the region, with the White House fully backing the Saudis. In its National Security Strategy issued in December, the Trump administration accused Iran of sponsoring terrorism across the globe and destabilizing the Near East. Last month at the UN, U.S. ambassador Nikki Haley displayed what she claimed were fragments of an Iranian-made missile allegedly fired at the airport in the Saudi capital of Riyadh by the Houthis. This was part of the Trump administration’s campaign to further isolate and squeeze Iran through harsher economic sanctions, which were first imposed in 1979.

Trump keeps threatening to cancel the nuclear deal with Iran struck by the Obama White House and reimpose sanctions on Iran’s oil exports, which were eased under the deal. While Tehran claims that its nuclear program is purely for energy purposes, U.S. bellicosity underlines that Iran needs nukes as a means to defend its sovereignty. *Down with all imperialist sanctions against Iran!*

Exacerbated by long years of sanctions, economic conditions for the masses in Iran continue to deteriorate. Over the

past year, labor strikes have erupted in several key industries, including oil and mining, often because workers just aren’t getting paid. More recently, plebeian protests have erupted in many parts of the country, triggered by growing poverty and the ostentatious corruption of the ruling clerical elite. The capitalist regime has responded with brutal repression.

Iran’s clerical regime came to power in 1979 amid a social upheaval against the despised, U.S.-backed autocrat Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. At that time, the convulsive opposition to the monarchy included powerful strikes in the oil fields and throughout the country, posing the potential for proletarian socialist revolution. However, the then-sizeable Iranian left criminally subordinated the working class to the mullah-dominated opposition. Uniquely, our international tendency raised the call: Down with the Shah! No support to Khomeini! For workers revolution in Iran!

The establishment of a Shia theocracy resulted in the savage repression of Kurds and other minorities; the execution of strikers, homosexuals, adulterers and others accused of “crimes against God”; the stoning of unveiled women; the slaughter of leftists and the suppression of all opposition parties. Drawing on the lessons of the past, the task for proletarian militants today is to begin the work of building a revolutionary Marxist party—an Iranian section of a reformed Trotskyist Fourth International. Such a party would seek to mobilize Iran’s multinational working class, standing at the head of all the oppressed, in the struggle to sweep away bourgeois rule. This perspective requires political opposition to all currents among Iran’s mullahs—as well as to any monarchists lurking in the shadows—and implacable opposition to the U.S. and other imperialist powers, which will seek to manipulate the grievances of Iran’s masses to serve their own interests.

From Yemen to Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, U.S. intervention has meant more misery and devastation, strengthening the most retrograde and anti-woman tribal and religious forces and fueling sectarian conflicts and pogroms. The multiracial U.S. working class has every interest in opposing the depredations of America’s capitalist rulers, whose rampages abroad go along with driving down wages, slashing health and pension benefits and unleashing the racist killer cops at home. The Spartacist League/U.S. is committed to building an internationalist workers party to lead the struggle for socialist revolution in the belly of the imperialist beast. ■



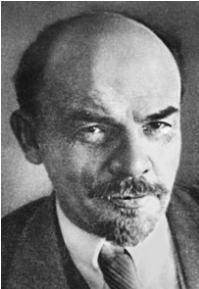
TROTSKY

January 21, Lenin, head of the Bolshevik Party and Soviet workers state, died after suffering a series of strokes following an assassination attempt. Liebknecht and Luxemburg’s assassination exemplified “democratic” bourgeois rule, as Lenin noted in a resolution presented to the First Congress of the Communist International.

In Germany, the most developed capitalist country of continental Europe, the very first months of full republican freedom, established as a result of imperialist Germany’s defeat [in World War I], have shown the German workers and the whole world the true class substance of the bourgeois-democratic republic. The murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg is an event of epoch-making significance not only because of the tragic death of these finest people and leaders of the truly proletarian, Communist International, but also because the class nature of an advanced European state—it can be said without exaggeration, of an advanced state on a world-wide scale—has been conclusively exposed. If those arrested, i.e., those placed under state protection, could be assassinated by officers and capitalists with impunity, and this under a government headed by social-patriots, then the democratic republic where such a thing was possible is a bourgeois dictatorship. Those who voice their indignation at the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg but fail to understand this fact are only demonstrating their stupidity, or hypocrisy. “Freedom” in the German republic, one of the freest and advanced republics of the world, is freedom to murder arrested leaders of the proletariat with impunity. Nor can it be otherwise as long as capitalism remains, for the development of democracy sharpens rather than dampens the class struggle which, by virtue of all the results and influences of the war and of its consequences, has been brought to boiling point....

In these circumstances, proletarian dictatorship is not only an absolutely legitimate means of overthrowing the exploiters and suppressing their resistance, but also absolutely necessary to the entire mass of working people, being their only defence against the bourgeois dictatorship which led to the war and is preparing new wars.

—V.I. Lenin, “Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” (4 March 1919)



LENIN

WORKERS VANGUARD

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12 January 2018

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Mexico: Earthquakes and Capitalist Criminal Negligence

The following article has been translated from Espartaco No. 48 (December 2017), which is published by the Grupo Espartaquista de México, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

Again on September 19, this time at 1:14 p.m., a 7.1 magnitude earthquake shook the center of Mexico. At the time, the anniversary of the earthquake that devastated Mexico City in 1985 and left an estimated 20,000 dead and 100,000 homeless was being commemorated. It would appear to be calculated cruelty: the new earthquake struck a little over two hours after a national disaster drill took place. Barely 12 days earlier, an even more

ESPARTACO

powerful 8.2 magnitude earthquake had rocked [the states of] Oaxaca and Chiapas.

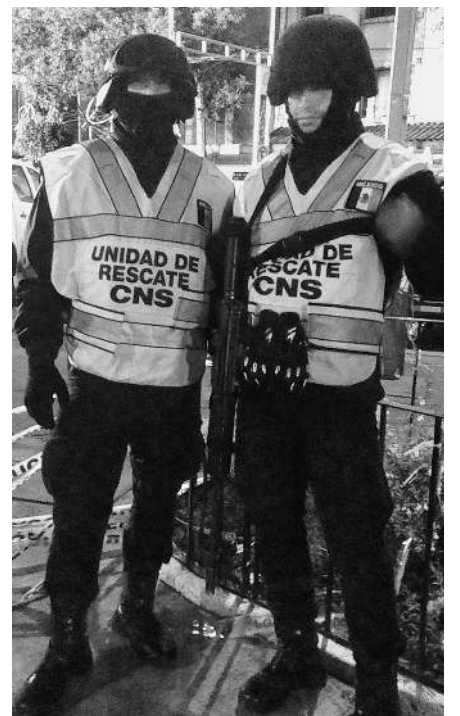
In Mexico City, scenes from 1985 were replayed. On one hand were the terror and dismay of the population, millions of whom were scarred for life by the 1985 tragedy. On the other hand, thousands of youth and workers voluntarily mobilized to begin rescue work and gather and distribute food and tools. A contingent of Central American immigrants on their way to the U.S. border stopped in Oaxaca to offer help, risking deportation, while the Cuban deformed workers state sent a brigade of doctors, despite its scarcity of resources and the hostility of [Mexican president Enrique] Peña Nieto (a lackey of *yanqui* imperialism).

Even if the scale of this tragedy was not close to that of 1985, according to official figures the recent earthquakes left 471 people dead, mainly in Mexico City, where 228 died. Eighty-three people died in Oaxaca and 74 in Morelos state. Although the disaster in Mexico City's exclusive Roma and Condesa neighborhoods dominated the news, poor areas in the south of the capital were practically devastated, as were impoverished towns in Oaxaca, Morelos, Chiapas and Puebla. Hundreds of thousands of Mexico City inhabitants were left without potable water. According to the Secretary of the Interior, 2.3 million people were left homeless in Oaxaca and Chiapas. But it isn't nature that should be blamed as centrally responsible for the loss of human lives—it's the capitalist system, which



El Universal

Left: Volunteers search earthquake rubble in Roma neighborhood of Mexico City, September 24. Right: Government “rescue units” were deployed to enforce capitalist law and order.



Espartaco

necessarily generates class inequality and subordinates the very lives of the poor to the production of profits.

When the bourgeoisie and its government speak of “natural disasters,” they are simply trying to cover up the criminal negligence and priorities of the capitalist system. Some of the collapsed buildings in the capital were poorly built multifamily residential buildings intended to house workers' families; other buildings had been opened only a few months before they caved in. In rural and semi-rural areas, many of the homes that collapsed had been built or expanded by workers or peasants on their own, with whatever materials they could afford and with scant structural planning.

The earthquakes exposed a small part of the enormous web of corruption connected to the unfettered real estate speculation that unites all levels of the government, the capitalist parties (the PRI [ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party], the PAN [right-wing National Action Party], the PRD [nationalist-populist Party of the Democratic Revolution], Morena [Movement for National Regeneration, a split from the PRD], etc.) and private consortiums. Between 2000 and 2012, under federal PAN governments some *seven*

million homes of “social interest” (for the poor) were built, the bulk of which are simply uninhabitable—rinky-dink dumps in remote housing developments lacking any services, prone to fire and likely to collapse with the wind and rain.

A handful of capitalists have augmented their already massive fortunes through these schemes, which involve Wall Street and imperialist institutions like the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (see “Mexico's Housing Debacle,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 November 2017). At the bottom of society, due to extremely onerous mortgages, hundreds of thousands of working-class families have lost everything or are trapped in these unsanitary ghettos. Almost 150 years ago, Friedrich Engels, who together with Karl Marx founded scientific socialism, taught us that “the housing shortage is no accident; it is a necessary institution and it can be abolished together with all its effects on health, etc., only if the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned” (*The Housing Question*, 1872).

Criminal Exploiters

The bourgeois media now speak of “solidarity” in an insulting campaign of flag-waving schmaltz. But the earthquakes showed, once again, the ineptitude, insatiable search for profit and disregard for human life and suffering on the part of the capitalist class, its state and its entire system. The 1985 earthquake brought to light the inhuman situation of industrial textile workers, especially women, when in the very center of the city almost 1,600 workers died. They were without a union, were paid miserable wages and were crammed into improvised workshops in rickety buildings packed with heavy machinery. Now, in the miserable Obrera neighborhood, a building collapsed that housed a dressmaking workshop and other businesses. To date, it's not clear how many workers perished, given that in most cases textile workers lack any legal benefits, and thus there is no reliable count of the workforce.

The September 19 Seamstresses Union was born out of the 1985 catastrophe. Today it has been practically destroyed due to attacks by the government and the bourgeoisie. Mexican workers organizations have been the target of an incessant offensive by the bosses since the 1980s, in the face of which the bulk of the trade-

union bureaucracies have simply ducked for cover. In 1985, unions like the SME electrical workers, which was destroyed in 2009 by the PAN's [Felipe] Calderón, and the miners and steel workers mobilized to carry out rescue work. But this time the battered organizations of the working class were absent. The extensive solidarity that was displayed lacked the discipline, experience, skill and class content that only the workers movement could provide.

It is necessary to revitalize and strengthen the unions by organizing the masses of workers that do not have union representation. The existing union leaderships are without exception pro-capitalist bureaucracies that tie workers to one or another bourgeois party and inculcate in the working class the notion that the capitalist state is everlasting. To unchain the proletariat's enormous social power, a struggle is needed to replace these bureaucracies with class-struggle leaderships committed to mobilizing the working class in the interest of all the exploited and oppressed.

Bourgeois State to the “Rescue”

With medical and rescue services overwhelmed, authorities asked the population for donations of everything from water, milk and tools to adrenaline. The shelters that were improvised were often unsanitary and exposed to inclement weather, especially in the countryside. At least a large part of the food and necessary supplies for the homeless came from the population. These donations were the object of innumerable cases of corruption by the government and bourgeois parties.

In this ever more militarized society, the government's only plan when faced with disaster situations is the mass mobilization of the forces of the capitalist state (the army, the navy, the police); firemen, paramedics and other rescue services barely exist. While the military may have participated in rescue efforts, the overwhelming majority of soldiers and navy men do not have the slightest training for such tasks: their job is to repress. In fact, while there was no shortage of assault rifles, the detachments of soldiers lacked shovels, pickaxes and any basic tool for removing rubble in search of trapped survivors. The police, meanwhile, are the guard dogs of the bourgeoisie, plain and simple.

The bourgeois state is a machine of coercion directed against the exploited
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Reuters

October 2017: Mexico City encampment set up after 1985 earthquake epitomizes wretched housing for millions in capital.

The Bankruptcy of Liberal Economists

“This expropriation [of capitalist property] will make it *possible* for the productive forces to develop to a tremendous extent. And when we see how incredibly capitalism is already *retarding* this development, when we see how much progress could be achieved on the basis of the level of technique already attained, we are entitled to say with the fullest confidence that the expropriation of the capitalists will inevitably result in an enormous development of the productive forces of human society.” [emphasis in original]

—V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917)

Lenin thus summarized Karl Marx’s fundamental critique of the capitalist system as well as the ultimate goal of socialism. Marxists gauge human progress by the development of mankind’s productive forces, from the stone tools of primitive

PART ONE

society to present-day science, technology and the modern factory. With the advent and development of industrial capitalism beginning in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, one could envisage for the first time a future end to scarcity and class divisions. However, the private ownership of the means of production increasingly acted as a brake on the further development of the productive forces, not least through periodic economic crises. The emergence of modern imperialism at the end of the 19th century marked the onset of an epoch of global capitalist decay. The major capitalist powers, having divided the world through imperial conquest, embarked on a series of wars for its redivision, seeking to expand their colonial holdings and spheres of domination at the expense of their rivals.

The goal of proletarian revolution is to resolve the contradiction at the heart of capitalism, in which production for private profit stifles overall productive growth. Collectivizing the means of production and making the bounty of society available to all, a workers state will organize all of industry in the way that an individual assembly line is today conceived: according to a rational plan. An international socialist economy, by applying scientific planning to the entire economic system, will unleash a qualitative development of the productive forces and of labor productivity. This will liberate the productive capacities of mankind, ultimately eliminating economic scarcity and, with that, laying the material basis for the disappearance of classes and the withering away of the state.

In contrast to that Marxist view, the equation of capitalism with unlimited economic growth was an article of faith for bourgeois economists of the post-World War II generation. Today, that faith has largely faded. In the eyes of liberal economists, the meager rate of economic growth experienced in the U.S. in the past few decades has become the “new normal.” Lawrence Summers, a key economic operator in the Bill Clinton administration in the 1990s, sees the advanced capitalist countries as having entered a prolonged period of “secular stagnation,” reviving a notion that originated among liberal Keynesians like Alvin Hansen during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

By Joseph Seymour and Bruce André

That view was reflected in the 2016 presidential election as Hillary Clinton offered nothing except more of the same—“America is great”—with maybe some minor tinkering. Even her left-liberal (“progressive”) Democratic Party challenger Bernie Sanders did not claim

the ken of his profession to understand, much less change:

“What do we know about accelerating long-run growth? According to the [Congressional] budget office, potential growth was pretty stable from 1970 to 2000, with nothing either Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton did making much obvious



Alamy

Older worker behind McDonald’s counter. Working class has been hard hit by decline in wages and benefits due to deindustrialization and attacks on unions.

that his policies would lead to a substantial boost in economic output but only that they would bring about a somewhat more equitable redistribution of income. Right-wing demagogue Donald Trump promoted the patent lie that he would double the current annual rate of economic growth from 2 percent to 4 percent, or even triple it.

Now, Trump and the Republican-dominated Congress, resurrecting Ronald Reagan’s supply-side economics, have pushed through a massive tax cut for corporations and the ultrarich. The idea that the benefits resulting from tax breaks for the wealthy will “trickle down” to the rest of the population in the form of increased investment, more jobs and higher wages is even more ludicrous today than it was in the 1980s, when it was the centerpiece of Reaganomics. American businesses are already sitting on an unprecedented stockpile of more than \$2.4 trillion in cash. Apple and General Motors are hoarding almost 30 percent of their total value in cash. Why are companies not investing those staggering sums in new plants, machinery and additional workers? The obvious answer is that they lack confidence that such investment would generate an acceptable rate of return.

Meanwhile, the Democrats do not even pretend to offer a policy alternative that might significantly increase the rate of growth. Paul Krugman, probably the country’s best-known “progressive” economist because of his regular column in the *New York Times*, defended Hillary Clinton during the presidential campaign on the grounds that government policy has little effect on economic growth, a supposedly mysterious process beyond

difference. The subsequent slide began under George W. Bush and continued under Mr. Obama. This history suggests no easy way to change the trend.”

—*New York Times*, 15 August 2016

The Falling Rate of Profit

A recent, book-length version of the “there’s not much we can do about economic growth” school of thought is Marc Levinson’s *An Extraordinary Time: The End of the Postwar Boom and the Return*

of the Ordinary Economy (2016). A former economics and finance editor of the *Economist*, house organ of Anglo-American bankers, Levinson strikes a contrarian pose, gleefully debunking the economic policy doctrines of both wings of the bourgeois political spectrum: Keynesianism on the left and monetarism and supply-side economics on the right. He contends that the relatively high rates of growth experienced by the advanced capitalist countries in the three decades after World War II amounted to a fortuitous historical accident that cannot be replicated by any kind of government policy.

A much weightier expression (in every respect) of historical pessimism with regard to the American economy is a recent book by a prominent liberal academic economist, Robert J. Gordon, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living Since the Civil War* (2016). Unlike *An Extraordinary Time*, which has a slapdash, journalistic quality, Gordon’s book (a 700-plus-page tome) is a work of serious scholarship. While Gordon’s argumentation differs somewhat from that of Levinson, as does the historical scope of his study, his conclusion is basically the same:

“This is a book about the drama of a revolutionary century when, through a set of miracles, economic growth accelerated, the modern world was created, and then after that creation the potential for future inventions having a similar impact on everyday life of necessity was inevitably diminished. The implications for the future of U.S. and world economic growth could not be more profound....

“The economic revolution of 1870 to 1970 was unique in human history, unrepeatable because so many of its achievements could happen only once.”

Gordon’s use of the term “miracles” underscores his belief that mere mortals cannot consciously control the quantity and content of the material wealth created by their labor.

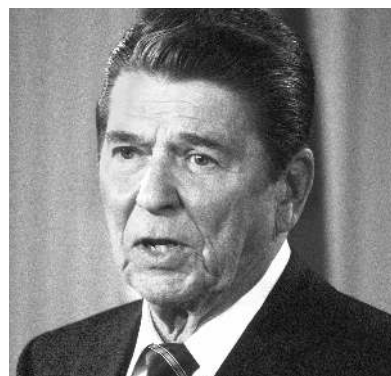
In the introductory section of *An Extraordinary Time*, Levinson defends Obama against a charge leveled by right-wing scribe George F. Will, who stated:



WV Photo



Getty (above); Diana Walker



Shuttered steel plant in Cleveland, 1980, during Democratic Jimmy Carter administration. Economic insecurity helped propel Republican Ronald Reagan to White House the following year.

Henkel Strikers Beat Back Union Busting Attack

OAKLAND—After over nine weeks on strike, some 70 members of International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 1584 beat back a concerted union-busting attack by the Henkel Corporation in Bay Point, California, which produces adhesives centrally for the aerospace industry. Henkel hired the Strom Engineering strikebreaking firm to provide scabs. The same outfit had mobilized thousands of scabs during the 2005 strike by airline mechanics and cleaners at Northwest Airlines. In the end, the union held firm against Henkel’s insistence that the strikers return to work alongside the scabs.

The Henkel workers were able to hold out with the assistance of thousands of dollars in donations from other Bay Area unions, including International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 6 and American Federation of

State, Council and Municipal Employees District Council 57. Members of these and other unions also joined the Henkel picket lines. If this solidarity had been translated into an actual mobilization of mass pickets, the scabs could have been stopped and Henkel’s production shut down tight. As it was, the scabs didn’t have the ability to keep production running at full capacity. Unable to meet orders for customers, which strikers said include Boeing, Airbus and the U.S. military, Henkel was forced to reach a settlement.

The strikers’ key demand was an end to criminally unsafe working conditions at the plant, where one worker was crushed to death in 2013 and others are routinely injured, often hideously (see “Victory to the Henkel Striker!” WV No. 1122, 17 November 2017). One striker told WV that the new contract allows workers to shut down unsafe machinery.

An IAM area director said that a joint union-management safety committee, to be joined for the first six months by a federal mediator, is now mandated. Federal mediators are an arm of the capitalist state, whose purpose is to defend the interests of the capitalists who amass vast wealth from the exploitation of labor. As the strike showed, the bosses’ profit-driven contempt for workers’ lives can be held in check only by the countervailing force of organized workers. What is needed is a union-only safety committee with the power to shut down production.

Workers can rely only on their own independent strength, mobilized in struggle against the exploiters and all their agencies and political parties. That the Henkel strikers were able to prevail in the face of an anti-union attack by a major international corporation is a small but real victory for labor.



WV Photo

October 25: IAM picket line at Henkel Aerospace.

“Making slow growth normal serves the progressive program of defining economic failure down.” To this Levinson replies, “as if the rate of economic growth were a matter of presidential discretion.” It is, of course, true that in *capitalist* America the policies of a given administration usually have a marginal effect on economic growth.

The expansion (or contraction) of the production of marketable goods and services under capitalism is mainly determined by the extent to which the executives of large corporations and Wall Street financiers invest profits in new productive facilities, especially those embodying more advanced (labor-saving) technologies. What drives capitalist investment is not the impulse to maximize output or labor productivity but rather to maximize *the rate of profit* (i.e., the ratio of profit to the market value of the means of production).

However, Marx, in one of his key insights, demonstrated that there is an inherent tendency for the rate of profit, the driving force of the capitalist system, to decline over time. By prompting capitalists to cut back their investments, a falling rate of profit generates periodic crises, usually triggered in financial markets. The result is a contraction of output and increased unemployment.

Marx’s explanation for the falling tendency of the rate of profit flowed from his understanding that surplus value—the unpaid portion of workers’ labor—is the source of profit, not the capitalists’ expenditures on the means of production (e.g., machinery and raw materials). Marx observed that especially in periods of economic boom, when workers can feel emboldened to demand higher wages, individual capitalists invest an increased amount of capital in plant upgrades and such in order to cut labor costs. By doing so, the capitalist gains a competitive advantage. However, as all capitalists follow suit, the total amount of surplus value generated per amount of capital invested—i.e., the average profit rate—declines.

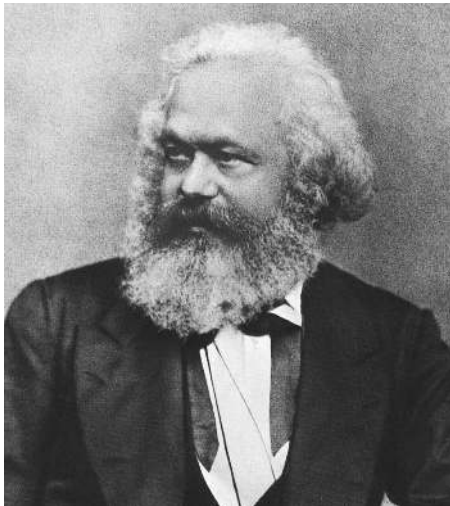
Capitalists invest in expanding productive capacity on the assumption that they will be able to sell the goods produced at a particular rate of profit. However, as the profit rate drops, they find themselves unable to sell their products at the expected profit rate. They cut back investments and slash production, resulting in an economic downturn. Workers are thrown out onto the street; entire factories become rusted relics.

Bourgeois economic ideologues, from Keynesians to monetarists and supply-siders, identify the laws governing the capitalist mode of production with the laws governing production *as such*. In the absence of a revolutionary working-class alternative, the appeal of Trump’s right-wing populist demagoguery is enhanced by the fact that both liberals, like Krugman and Gordon, as well as centrists on the bourgeois political spectrum, like Sum-

mers and Levinson, insist that it is *not possible* to overcome the decades-long stagnation in the living standards of American working people.

From Kennedy’s “New Economics” to Obama’s “New Normal”

In the past, Democratic politicians, especially those on the more liberal wing of the party, promised to deliver a new era of economic prosperity. John F. Kennedy’s successful 1960 presidential campaign against Richard Nixon, who had been vice president in the Republican Eisenhower administration (1953-61), was dominated by Cold War tensions with the



John Mayall

Karl Marx demonstrated that falling rate of profit is endemic to capitalism, leading to periodic crises.

Soviet Union and fears among the ruling class that the U.S. was falling behind in science and technology. In its economic message, Kennedy’s campaign resembled Trump’s. His platform called for boosting economic growth and dynamism under the slogan “Let’s get this country moving again.” He pointed to the sluggish economic performance, punctuated by two recessions, during Eisenhower’s second term. In this respect, the campaign tactics used by Kennedy against Nixon and Eisenhower were similar to those used by Trump against Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

In *An Extraordinary Time*, Levinson retrospectively criticizes liberal Keynesians like Walter Heller, chief economic adviser to both the Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson administrations. Heller claimed that fiscal policy (taxation and government expenditure) could be fine-tuned so as to maintain full employment and maximize economic growth. By the late 1970s, Democratic politicians and their intellectual apologists were singing a different, more downbeat, tune.

Capitalizing on the downfall of Nixon resulting from the Watergate scandal, in 1977 Jimmy Carter, a centrist Southern Democrat (like Bill Clinton), entered the White House. A few years later, the hapless Carter administration confronted an unusual condition termed “stagflation”: rapidly rising prices combined with a

recession. Levinson describes the widespread economic insecurity that propelled the right-wing Republican Reagan to the presidency in 1981: “The conservative ascendance came only as mortgage interest rates above 11 percent made young people despair of ever buying a home and as layoff notices went out to ironworkers on construction sites and toolmakers in auto plants.”

Surveying those dismal times, a mainstream liberal academic economist, Lester C. Thurow, published a book in 1980 on the state of the U.S. economy titled *The Zero-Sum Society: Distribution and the Possibilities for Economic Change*. As indicated by the title, Thurow argued that it was no longer possible to substantially increase the size of the economic pie so that everyone would get a somewhat bigger piece. Economic policy now involved recutting the existing pie such that some people would get a larger slice and others a smaller one:

“For most of our problems there are several solutions. But all these solutions have the characteristic that someone must suffer large economic losses. No one wants to volunteer for this role, and we have a political process that is incapable of forcing anyone to shoulder this burden. Everyone wants someone else to suffer the necessary economic losses, and as a consequence none of the possible solutions can be adopted.”

In fact, the almost four decades since Thurow wrote those lines have seen an unrelenting war by the bourgeoisie to force workers, minorities and the poor to “suffer the necessary economic losses” to bolster capitalist profits. That one-sided war on workers has been facilitated by the trade-union bureaucracy, which maneuvers for crumbs while peddling a mythical “partnership” of labor with the bosses and their parties, particularly Democrats who falsely pose as “friends of labor.”

Technological Innovation and Capitalist Investment

The main theme of Levinson’s *An Extraordinary Time* is that economic growth, based on increasing labor productivity through technological innovation, is impervious to government policy. After listing several explanations offered by academic economists for the slower growth of labor productivity in the advanced capitalist countries since the 1970s, Levinson concludes:

“None of these explanations sufficed to explain the productivity bust afflicting countries with vastly different economies and divergent approaches to economic policy. The more deeply the scholars mined the data, the more confused they became. What the data could not yet show was that the world had moved to a new stage of economic growth, one that would develop in a far different way....

“Future advances in well-being would depend heavily on developing innovations and putting them to effective use.”

The last statement is manifestly true. Increases in labor productivity under capitalism are determined by two main factors: the extent to which capitalists invest their profits in new productive facilities

(plant and equipment) embodying more advanced technology and the degree to which the new technology increases output per unit of labor input.

Levinson does recognize a causal link between the slowdown in the growth of labor productivity and a decline in the rate of capital investment:

“Across the wealthy economies, business investment, which had increased an average of 5.6 percent per year between 1960 and 1973, grew at a far slower rate, barely 4 percent per year, for the next two decades. Sluggish investment left steel mills operating antiquated blast furnaces and insurance offices using high-speed computer printers to spit out form upon form for clerks to organize in file cabinets. Technological innovations usually arrive in the business world incorporated in new equipment and facilities. With firms deferring such investments at every turn, their workers’ productivity improved at less than half the rate in the decades after 1973 as in the decades before.”

However, Levinson makes no effort to explain *why* the rate of investment has declined to such an extent. In particular, he does not consider the interrelationship between capital investment, technological innovation and the rate of profit.

As Marx underlined, capitalists will invest in new facilities incorporating more advanced technology if, and only if, they believe the increase in profit per worker will be greater than the increased market value of capital per worker. If capitalists discover that their investments are not generating a competitive rate of profit, they will halt or cut back their investments, often triggering an economic downturn.

Marx thus proved that capitalist production increasingly puts the brakes on historical development, at the same time that it creates capitalism’s own gravedigger, the proletariat. He and Friedrich Engels explained that the only way to end the boom-bust cycles inherent to capitalism is for the working class to take control of the means of production through socialist revolution and institute a planned, collectivized economy.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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and the

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Mexico...

(continued from page 3)

and oppressed at the service of the capitalists and their regime. In that vein, a central purpose of the state forces was to intimidate the population and protect private property from “looting,” i.e., desperate people procuring necessary consumables. The real looters are the capitalists, who squeeze out of the workers their very last drop of sweat and blood! Just as in 1985, the *cuerpo de granaderos* [riot police] soon cordoned off disaster areas to contain the indignation and rage of residents, who still did not know the fate of their relatives and friends when the government decided to end rescue efforts and bring in heavy machinery.

“Reconstruction” and Bourgeois Philanthropy

Oozing elitism, PRI president Peña Nieto, with Miguel Mancera of the PRD (head of the Mexico City government) at his side, announced with great fanfare that he would grant the capital’s homeless 3,000 pesos [approximately \$160] a month to pay rent for up to three months—an amount barely enough to pay for a room. Owners of collapsed homes in the city will receive mortgage credits of up to two million pesos [\$105,000] for 20 years at 9 percent annual interest. Those who lost everything, maybe even their families, can now acquire one more debt with the capitalist government and bloodsucking banks.

Peasants in Oaxaca and Chiapas were promised 120,000 pesos if their homes were destroyed and 15,000 if they only suffered “partial damage.” In Chiapas alone, almost 17,000 homes collapsed. The racist Peña Nieto sermonized that with the money, people should have enough to build “decent and dignified two-room” homes, as long as they don’t spend it on something else. This was an allusion to the vile stereotype of indigenous people spending all their money on alcohol.

Having promised 120,000 pesos, the cruel government reconsidered. Since a good number of homes still had a wall standing, such damage was in the end considered “partial.” So the government deducted 105,000 pesos from those affected. In any case, many of the homeless in the southeast have protested that they haven’t received *a single peso*, since they were given bankcards without funds.

The same builders who, hand-in-hand with the government, are centrally responsible for the tragedy will now make a killing from reconstruction, including of Catholic churches, which will be paid for out of public funds. However, in a display of Christian compunction, the “private initiative” (the bosses) donated four billion pesos, and the Vatican gave alms of \$150,000 (not enough to rebuild even one of the lavish churches). That kind-hearted soul Carlos Slim [telecom magnate] “raised” 2.3 billion pesos, money

that was “donated” basically by hundreds of thousands of people paying the monopolistic phone charges that allowed him to become one of the world’s richest men. Sweet philanthropy! As Engels wrote of the bourgeois philanthropic hypocrites in 19th-century England:

“As though you rendered the proletarians a service in first sucking out their very life-blood and then practicing your self-complacent, Pharisaic philanthropy upon them, placing yourselves before the world as mighty benefactors of humanity when you give back to the plundered victims the hundredth part of what belongs to them! Charity which degrades him who gives more than him who takes; charity which treads the downtrodden still deeper in the dust, which demands that the degraded,



September 19: Municipal president Avelino Méndez Rangel of Morena chased off in Xochimilco area of Mexico City by residents angry at government corruption and lack of aid for earthquake victims.

the pariah cast out by society, shall first surrender the last that remains to him, his very claim to manhood, shall first beg for mercy before your mercy deigns to press, in the shape of an alms, the brand of degradation upon his brow.”

—The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845)

No Illusions in the Capitalist Parties!

Now that the child has drowned, they want to cover the well. Facing popular pressure, [Andrés Manuel] López Obrador (AMLO) and his Morena promised to donate a little more than 100 million pesos for the homeless. The other capitalist parties will also donate part of the millions they get in subsidies to those affected by the earthquake, even though they, along with government authorities, had originally met the proposal with indignation. In the face of growing discontent, López Obrador wants to offer a little more carrot without easing up on the stick. AMLO is a bourgeois populist committed to the capitalist order—he and his Morena are no less enemies of proletarian victory than are the PRI, PAN and PRD.

AMLO bases his whole 2018 presidential campaign on rhetoric against the “corruption” of the “mafia in power.” But corruption is inevitable under capitalism. And don’t forget, it was successive PRD

Mexico City governments—starting with López Obrador in 2000, when he was still in the PRD—that unleashed real estate speculation. Criminal corruption around permits and supervision of construction in the city occurred for the most part under its PRD governments, as well as borough administrations under Morena (in Cuauhtémoc, Tláhuac and Xochimilco) and the PAN (in Benito Juárez).

There is without a doubt disgust and anger at the capitalist rulers among the Mexican masses. After September 19, Secretary of the Interior Osorio Chong and municipal president Avelino Méndez Rangel of Morena confirmed this for themselves when they had to haul ass to

save their hides from the fury of residents of Obrera and Xochimilco respectively. But what is missing is a *class* understanding. The masses’ miserable situation, as well as the rulers’ disdain for human welfare, are not the products of the policies of one or another party or individual, but rather are inevitable characteristics of the capitalist system based on private ownership of the means of production.

For a Workers and Peasants Government!

Half of this country is in an area of intense seismic activity, and practically the entire coastline is under the annual threat of hurricanes. In Mexico City, one of the most populous cities in the world, danger from earthquakes is increased by the fact that a large part of it is built on a lakebed. Scientific institutions as well as the government were fully aware that a new and potentially catastrophic earthquake was just a matter of time. Though earthquakes, like other natural phenomena, are unpredictable, technology exists that can give the population some advance warning, depending on the distance from the epicenter. But preventing disasters is far from capitalism’s priority. In this society everything, including science, is subordinated to the enrichment of a handful. The agency responsible for the famous (and most often inaudible) seismic alert system is a private entity, an obscure civil association called CIRES, that offers early-warning systems

for more than 50,000 pesos. And Mexico City’s supposedly strict anti-earthquake construction standards are worth nothing when making money is involved.

Incapable of providing everyone with safety, health care, decent housing and employment, capitalism deserves to perish. Against the bourgeoisie’s speculation and fraud, in order to reconstruct disaster zones and tackle unemployment, we are for an extensive plan of public works and housing improvement under union control—let the workers themselves ensure the quality of materials and construction—and for a sliding scale of wages and work hours. A struggle for goals like these would light the way toward the necessary revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. A workers and peasants government—the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry—would put science at the service of society, which would at least help minimize the effects of natural disasters.

Faced with rural misery, workers are forced to cram into cities in search of some way to survive, living in rooms as dismal as they are expensive and often lacking basic services. As a basic and immediate way to begin solving the housing problem, a workers state would expropriate the opulent residences of the possessing classes and open them to workers who are homeless or in overcrowded housing. We communists work to see the day when the true producers of society’s wealth occupy the mansions and luxury apartments of the Polanco and Las Lomas de Chapultepec neighborhoods...and the presidential residence at Los Pinos!

Workers and peasants in power would fight to overcome the contradiction between the city and the countryside. Such a regime would seek to eliminate ancestral rural backwardness by bringing all of modern society’s advances to the countryside: decent, comfortable housing; roads; schools; telecommunications; industry and scientific agriculture; etc. As a result, a huge, chaotic, overpopulated, dirty, polluted city like Mexico City, which is sinking and collapsing, could gradually be eliminated.

This perspective is not realizable without the international extension of the revolution, especially to advanced countries like the U.S. and other powers, which would put enormous resources inherited from imperialist capitalism at the service of the world’s vast dispossessed and oppressed masses. It is necessary to forge Leninist-Trotskyist parties, following the example and experience of the Bolsheviks who brought the Russian workers and peasants to power in 1917. Such parties would fight for socialist revolutions internationally to destroy capitalism and set the foundations for a new society, where those who labor rule, on the basis of the collectivization of the means of production. Humanity’s struggle against blind nature requires the expropriation of the capitalist expropriators and the establishment of an international planned economy dedicated to satisfying human needs. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Irish Soccer Player Stands Up to British Chauvinists

The following article is reprinted from Workers Hammer No. 240 (Winter 2017-2018), published by our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain. The poppy wearing referred to in the article occurs on, and in the lead-up to, the November 11 Remembrance Day to commemorate British war veterans, and as such glorifies imperialist barbarism.

WORKERS HAMMER

Every November, one prominent footballer [soccer player] refuses to participate in the jingoist carnival of poppy wearing: West Bromwich Albion player and Republic of Ireland international

after the event. It is just a part of who we are, ingrained into us from birth.”

His letter stressed that to wear a poppy “would be seen as an act of disrespect to those people; to my people.”

Opposition to the poppy has also been expressed by a group of Glasgow Celtic fans who in 2010 unfurled a banner at their ground which declared: “Your deeds would shame all the devils in Hell. Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan. No bloodstained poppy on our Hoops [Celtic’s green-striped jersey].”

While we salute McClean’s refusal to wear a poppy, the reasons for his protest are restricted to British imperialism’s crimes in Ireland. Thus he stated in a 2015 West Brom matchday programme, “If the

Marshal Douglas Haig. “Butcher” Haig personified the capitalist ruling class’s commitment to fight to the last drop of working-class blood to maintain the Empire. He was the architect of the 1916 Battle of the Somme: four months of carnage in which the Allies suffered 88,000 casualties for every mile of territory gained. The perversity of Haig’s strategy of attrition was acerbically captured in the 1989 comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth*. Upon hearing his men are to be sent “over the top” to attack the German trenches, Captain Blackadder quips: “‘Are we all going to get killed?’ Yes. Clearly, Field Marshal Haig is about to make yet another gargantuan effort to move his drinks cabinet six inches closer to Berlin.”

established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.”

— *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916)

The imperialist system that emerged in the last decades of the 19th century was marked by the bloody subjugation of the peoples of Asia and Africa as the great powers divided up the world. Once that was accomplished, the colonial world could only be repartitioned by military means and WWI was the inevitable outcome. The unprecedented slaughter in the war demonstrated definitively the barbarism inherent in capitalism, which needed to be swept away by a series of socialist revolutions.

Most national sections of the Social-Democratic Second International, including the [British] Labour Party, supported their “own” capitalist rulers in the war. In contrast, Lenin upheld the Marxist position of class struggle against the capitalist exploiters under the slogan “turn the imperialist war into a civil war.” Opposition to the imperialist war and their own ruling class was a key factor enabling Lenin’s Bolsheviks to lead the war-weary working class to power in the 1917 October Revolution in Russia.

It is common today for liberal supporters of the EU to accuse right-wing leave [Brexit] supporters of hypocrisy for wearing the poppy, under the false premise that it is the EU that has prevented another continental war. For example, an article in the *Independent* (9 November 2017), “If you voted to leave the EU, don’t bother wearing a poppy,” asserted: “The EU was founded after the world wars with the aim of keeping peace in Europe.” In fact the EU was founded as an economic adjunct to the U.S.-dominated NATO military alliance, which was aimed against the Soviet Union.

Especially since capitalist counterrevolution destroyed the Soviet Union in 1991-92, the EU has functioned as a trade bloc enabling the European imperialists to better compete against their American and Japanese rivals. It has also allowed Germany to play the hegemonic role in Europe it previously sought to achieve through military means. Germany, Britain and France in particular have used the EU to reduce the countries of southern and eastern Europe to vast reservoirs of cheap labour, while also ratcheting up the exploitation of the working class at home. Recognising that Brexit would deal a blow to the EU bankers and bosses cartel, we advocated a leave vote in the referendum. Down with the EU! Britain out now!

Putting an end to imperialist barbarism requires socialist revolutions, in Britain and internationally, through which the working class becomes the ruling class. The necessary instrument to lead the working class to power is a Leninist vanguard party. The Spartacist League, section of the International Communist League, fights to build such a party in Britain as a section of a reformed Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution. *For a Socialist United States of Europe!* ■



Left: Mural in Derry, Northern Ireland, depicts British Army’s 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre of 14 unarmed Catholics. Above: Labour Party’s Jeremy Corbyn and Tory prime minister Theresa May, with former PMs Tony Blair and John Major, honor British imperialism, Remembrance Day 2017.

James McClean. As Keith Duggan wrote in the *Irish Times* (11 November 2017) following the West Brom v. Huddersfield Town match on November 4:

“Here he comes again: storming through the dank Saturdays of another November in which he is cast as a figure of hatred across England’s football theatres for his personal decision not to wear a Remembrance Day poppy. Here he is railing against the BBC, Voice of Blighty, for highlighting a heavy tackle he made but ignoring the bottles and coins then flung at him from a contingent of last Saturday’s Huddersfield crowd enraged by his presence.”

Since he began playing professional football in England in 2011, McClean has made a courageous stand by refusing to wear a “Remembrance Poppy” commemorating bloody British imperialism on his club shirt. In response he has received abuse from the terraces, vilification from the media and even death threats. In his time at Sunderland, McClean received so much chauvinist abuse from the home fans that he chose to take a pay cut and transfer to Championship side Wigan Athletic in 2013.

McClean grew up on the Catholic Creggan housing estate in Derry, Northern Ireland. He is all too aware of the brutality meted out by British imperialism to the oppressed Irish Catholics. In a 2014 letter to the chairman of Wigan, McClean explained his refusal to wear a poppy. He referenced Derry’s Bloody Sunday, when the British Army massacred 14 Irish civilians in 1972:

“When you come from Creggan like myself or the Bogside, Brandywell or the majority of places in Derry, every person still lives in the shadow of one of the darkest days in Ireland’s history—even if like me you were born nearly 20 years

poppy was simply about World War One and Two victims alone, I’d wear it without a problem.” In fact, the poppy commemorates murderous British imperialism, not its victims. As Robert Fisk noted in the *Independent* (3 November 2016), it is “the very last symbol that ‘our’ dead remain more precious than the millions of human beings we have killed, in the Middle East for example, for whom we wear no token of remembrance. Lord Blair of Kut al-Amara will be wearing his poppy this week — but not for those he liquidated in his grotesque invasion of Iraq.”

As proletarian internationalists, we uphold the revolutionary opposition of our Marxist forbears to their “own” imperialist ruling class in both World Wars. Likewise we oppose British imperialism in Ireland and in all of its other blood-soaked adventures around the world. British troops and bases out of Northern Ireland! Britain out of the Near East and Afghanistan!

The pageantry around Remembrance Sunday and the poppy is intended to glorify murderous British imperialism and to whip up support for, and drum up new recruits for, the ruling class’s ongoing wars. This purpose was captured by Brian Hanley in the *Irish Times* (9 November 2013): “What one historian has called ‘poppyganda’ is part of a renewed militarisation of British public life. As a group of British veterans of the Iraq war complained two years ago, the build-up to Armistice Day now amounts to ‘a month-long drum roll of support for current wars.’”

British Imperialism: Enemy of Workers and Oppressed

The Royal British Legion’s Poppy Appeal was originally named after Field

The Battle of the Somme resulted in over a million people killed or wounded on both sides. The bloodlust of the imperialist rulers not sated, Haig did it all over again the next year at Passchendaele, where there were another 700,000 Allied and German casualties.

World War I was a conflict between the imperialist powers over how to redivide the world. It was the result of neither a series of mishaps nor the personal psychoses of certain members of the ruling elite, but was a product of the workings of the capitalist system in the epoch of imperialism. As Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin explained:

“Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is

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Nyet to Winter Olympics Ban of Russia!

For the first time in the history of the Olympics, a whole country has been banned from competition for doping. In early December, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) suspended Russia, a core IOC member, and barred it from sending a team to the 2018 Winter Games, which begin on February 8 in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Although some individual athletes may be invited to participate in neutral uniforms if deemed “clean” by a special anti-doping panel, a cloud of suspicion nevertheless hangs over all Russian competitors. The whole business drips with hypocrisy. Doping—the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs)—is a common practice among competitive athletes worldwide, as is its systematic cover-up.

The sweeping new sanctions are based on World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and IOC reports claiming that Moscow turned the WADA-accredited anti-doping lab at the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi into a machine for covering up doping by Russian athletes. In reality, for three years the U.S. and its allies have put the IOC under relentless pressure to single out and punish this Olympic powerhouse. The pressure via the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) and other such bodies was so great that in November, IOC president Thomas Bach told them to stand down lest they jeopardize the appearance of “the right to a fair procedure.”

The Winter Olympics ban is an extension of the vindictive exclusion of the Russian track and field team from the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. The sanctions go so far as to permanently ban Vitaly Mutko, formerly Russia’s minister of sport, now its deputy prime minister, from involvement in all future Olympics. These moves parallel attempts by the U.S. imperialists to isolate Russia, a regional capitalist power and potential rival—one, moreover, with sizable nuclear capability. They are of a piece with economic sanctions against Russia, including over Crimea’s reunification with Russia in 2014, and the more recent howls by Democratic Party politicians and others that the Russians allegedly hacked the 2016 presidential elections.

We say: Let the Russians compete! We oppose the ban on PEDs in sports. Whether an individual uses drugs—for fun or perceived enhancement of athletic ability—is a personal choice. So long as there has been athletic competition, sportsmen, aided by coaches, have experimented with everything conceivable, from altering training regimens and diet to ingesting any substance perceived to give them competitive advantage. In large part, the current frenzy over PEDs has been stoked by the decades-long “war on drugs,” which in racist capitalist America has filled the prisons with generations of overwhelmingly black and Latino youth. We demand the decriminalization of drugs as part

of our opposition to all laws against so-called “crimes without victims.”

As we wrote at the time of the Rio Games:

“The witchhunt against PEDs contradicts the Olympic motto ‘Faster, Higher, Stronger.’ A rational society would embrace the potentialities of improving human athletic performance, including through performance-enhancing drugs, while at the same time conducting an objective scientific study of the potential benefits and medical dangers. Dropping the ban on PEDs would also allow users to come out of the shadows and take the drugs under medical supervision. But capitalist society is not rational.”

—“Let the Russians Play!”

WV No. 1093, 29 July 2016

The Pyeongchang Games without Russia, as British sociologist Ellis Cashmore put it, “will be like a Terminator movie without Arnold Schwarzenegger.” With the Russians out of the way, the American team and other top contenders, themselves no strangers to PED use, better their chances of cleaning up. Here’s the kind of “level playing field” promised by sports officials who punished the Russians in 2016. Now, in the context of the new Russia ban, there is a sharper focus on star athletes from countries not rich enough to fund robust anti-doping apparatuses, with the presumption that they must be cheating. Five such countries, including distance-running powers Kenya and

Russian figure skating champion Evgenia Medvedeva opposes ban on Russia, refuses to participate in Winter Olympics in “neutral” uniform.



Reuters

Juan Antonio Samaranch, a supporter of Spain’s bloody Franco dictatorship. These are the kinds of men and women who claim the moral authority to decide what constitutes “clean” sport.

Their case against Russia rests largely on allegations by Grigory Rodchenkov, former head of Moscow’s anti-doping laboratory. Having earlier certified that Russian athletes had not used PEDs, he is today singing a different tune, testifying that he “spent years helping Russia’s athletes gain an edge by using banned substances” (*New York Times*, 28 November 2017). Having fled to the U.S., Rodchenkov is currently enrolled in a witness protection program. The reports commissioned by WADA and the IOC that hinge on the testimony of this proven liar are

reminiscent of the January 2017 joint report by the CIA, FBI and NSA that supposedly proved Russian interference in the 2016 elections, but which, by the admission of its authors, offered not one shred of evidence.

Not surprisingly, USADA, which fought tooth-and-nail for banning Russia from Pyeongchang, is much more likely to make allowances when it comes to alleged doping by U.S. athletes. For example, USADA data obtained by the Fancy Bears hacker group and published by the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* document routine approvals of last-minute “Therapeutic Use Exemptions” (TUEs)—1,330 were granted in 2015.

Approved TUEs allowed cyclists to use asthma medications that improve oxygen intake and gymnasts to use Ritalin to sharpen concentration on balance beams and parallel bars. The real question, however, is why such substances should be banned in the first place.

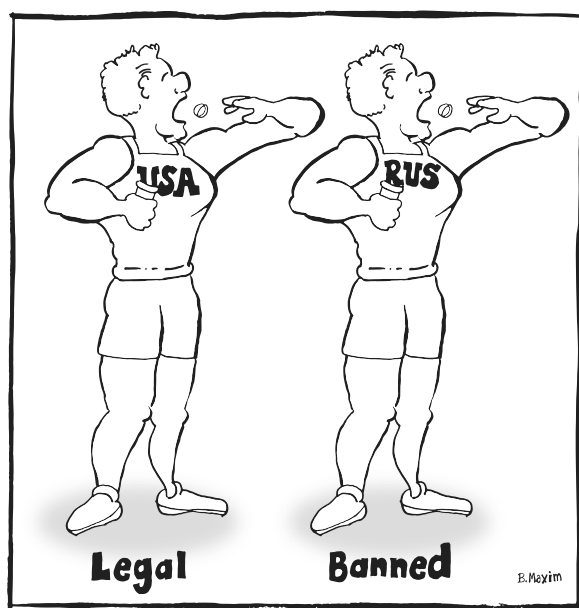
Each year, WADA publishes a list of banned substances and treatments. Some are prohibited at all times and others in competition, while still others are banned for particular sports. The 2018 list contains some 300 prohibited substances. More are added all the time. These include substances that show up more often than oth-

ers in testing, and are hence *presumed* to be PEDs. Caffeine, although not prohibited (as it was for 20 years until 2004), is on the monitoring program list, so it could be added back. A drug that may have still been allowed at the beginning of the year could result in a doping ban a few months later. The athletes themselves are responsible for keeping track of what is allowed and what is not, a significant challenge given the volatility of the banned substance list.

The myth peddled by the IOC that the Olympic Games “contribute to building a peaceful and better world” is utterly belied by the regular outpourings of chauvinist pageantry and ideology that suffuse the Games, which are organized along nation-state lines and are subordinated to politics. At the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Nazi Germany intended to showcase the superiority of the “Aryan master race,” but Hitler’s parade was smashed by black U.S. track star Jesse Owens when he won four gold medals. Even so, the U.S. Olympic Committee under Avery Brundage did its best to appease Hitler by removing Jewish sprinters Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller from the 400-meter relay, sparing the *führer* the sight of Jews on the medal stand.

The hysteria over performance enhancers began in response to the international successes of athletes from the Soviet Union and East Europe in the 1970s and ’80s. The campaign against athletes from those bureaucratically ruled workers states intensified with the renewed Cold War led by U.S. imperialism in the late 1970s under Democratic president Jimmy Carter. Following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan against the murderous, U.S.-backed *mujahedin*—the precursors of the Taliban, Al Qaeda and ISIS—Carter ordered the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, with the aim of whipping up an anti-Soviet frenzy.

With the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 and the restoration of brutal capitalist rule, now under strongman Vladimir Putin, the U.S. rulers’ hostility to Russia is no longer about overthrowing the collectivized property forms that were established by the 1917 October Revolution. What they want now is to keep capitalist Russia out of the club of imperialist powers. In line with its efforts to isolate Russia, the U.S. has once again made the Olympics a pawn in its game. ■



Ethiopia, have been placed on a doping watch list. Jamaica, with its top-notch sprinters, is also under increased scrutiny.

Thomas Bach, who proudly announced in 2015 that half a billion dollars was spent annually worldwide on anti-doping tests, has himself been accused of cheating—for allegedly trying to defeat electronic sensors in fencing competitions in the 1970s. Nonetheless, he has risen to the top of the IOC, which is dominated by rich reactionaries and includes princes, princesses and sheiks. Like many other current IOC members, Bach was elevated to the body by its former president