

\$129 million pay package for new Yahoo CEO

Barry Grey
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Last week the corporate and media world was abuzz with the news that Marissa Mayer, an engineer and vice president at Google, had agreed to become CEO of rival Yahoo for the tidy sum of as much as \$129 million over five years.

This is considerably more than the \$102 million the city of Detroit said it would save when, the same week, its Democratic mayor, David Bing, unilaterally imposed an across-the-board 10 percent cut in city workers' pay, along with drastic cuts in health care and hundreds of layoffs.

The obscene and absurd compensation package for Mayer—at a time when manufacturing workers are being told their new wage benchmark is \$13 an hour or less—is but one more expression of the decay of capitalism and the decadence of the new aristocracy that presides over it. Nowhere are the avarice of the ruling class and its plundering of society more naked than in America.

What miracles has Ms. Mayer performed to merit such a reward? A graduate of Stanford University, the 37-year-old Silicon Valley executive's signature achievement, it seems, is to have been among the first 20 employees of Google. When the firm went public in 2004, its initial public offering turned her overnight into the owner of \$300 million worth of stock.

She used a chunk of her fortune to purchase a penthouse on the top floor of the Four Seasons Hotel in San Francisco, which remains one of her two primary residences, along with a mansion in Palo Alto. Mayer is, according to press reports, known for her lavish parties, political fundraisers for Barack Obama, and designer shoes and gowns.

No slouch when it comes to conspicuous consumption, she sports a bathroom ceiling covered by a Dale Chihuly glass installation. She is famous in certain circles for having once paid \$60,000 at a charity auction to have lunch with Oscar de la Renta.

In a regulatory filing last Thursday, Yahoo disclosed details of its new chief executive's compensation package. Mayer's annual base salary will be \$1 million.

She will receive as well an additional annual bonus of \$2 million to \$4 million. On top of that, she gets annual stock awards worth \$12 million a year.

Then there is the one-time "make-whole" payment of \$14 million for the stock she leaves behind at Google, plus a one-time retention bonus of \$30 million.

Mayer becomes the fifth CEO of the struggling Sunnyvale, California firm in five years. Her two immediate predecessors did not fare badly despite being fired, in one case for poor performance and in the other for false statements on his resume. Carol Bartz, who was sacked in September 2011, received up to \$3 million in severance pay. Mayer's immediate predecessor, Scott Thompson, was removed after only four months on the job, but walked away with \$7 million in cash and stock grants.

Still, Mayer lags behind another high tech CEO, Timothy Cook of Apple, whose package calls for \$378 million over ten years.

The executive-socialite sits on the boards of Wal-Mart, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Ballet and the New York Ballet.

Much of the press hailed Mayer's appointment as a triumph for women's rights, the enthusiasm compounded by her announcement that she was pregnant. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote: "The revelations were an instant hit on the Web, particularly among working moms and professional women. It was vintage Mayer. A quirky math geek with Grace Kelly looks and a taste for designer shoes, the 37-year-old has deftly navigated the male-dominated tech world with a combination of smarts and style."

One wants to retch reading such drivel. Is it really necessary to prove that women bosses can be just as avaricious and decadent as their male counterparts? Such outpourings, and there are many in the media, do have the merit, however, of highlighting the social interests that underlie the obsession with feminism and identity politics that characterizes the so-called "left." There is no such enthusiasm among women in working-class communities

struggling to survive and maintain their families in the face of falling wages and benefits and mass unemployment.

This celebration of greed and selfishness occurs, of course, in the midst of the deepest social crisis since the Great Depression. Recent studies have shown, for example, that there are 1.46 million households in America (about 4 million people) living on less than \$2 per person per day, a 130 percent increase since 1996. Extreme poverty, defined as family income less than half the federal poverty threshold, is up 50 percent since 2000. And median net worth in the US fell by 38.8 percent between 2007 and 2010.

The impoverishment of the working class has gone hand in hand with the further enrichment of the aristocracy, with corporate profits and executive pay hitting new highs. The ever-growing concentration of wealth at the top is incompatible with any form of democracy, and the breakdown of capitalism since 2008 has been accompanied by the further eruption of militarism abroad and imposition of police-state measures at home.

Marissa Mayer may be the poster woman for the affluent upper middle class and super-rich, but her pay package is an objective expression of the utter irrationality and socially destructive character of capitalism—as well as the moral and political putrefaction of the ruling class.

This total waste of social resources is a powerful argument for the nationalization of the major corporations and banks and their transformation into public utilities under the democratic control of the working population, as well as the expropriation of much of the private wealth accumulated by the financial aristocracy through quasi-criminal and fraudulent means.

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