

As protests grow, corporate CEOs hypocritically declare opposition to “racism and injustice”

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In response to the historic multi-racial protests against the murder of George Floyd and other police killings, the top executives of major US corporations have issued hypocritical statements criticizing “racism and injustice” in America.

“The pain of the last week reminds us how far our country has to go to give every person the freedom to live with dignity and peace,” Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg declared, pledging to give \$10 million to “groups working on racial justice.”

Amazon chief Jeff Bezos posted on his Instagram account that “the pain and emotional trauma caused by the racism and violence we are witnessing toward the black community has a long reach.”

Similar remarks were made by the heads of tech giants Intel, Microsoft, Apple, Cisco and Google, the chief executives of Goldman Sachs, Citigroup and other Wall Street banks, and the CEOs of General Motors, Ford and other industrial corporations.

Well aware of the massive popular support for the anti-racist protests throughout the US and the world, the tech billionaires and other corporate executives have issued these PR statements to protect their marketing and commercial interests. But the statements also express concern within ruling circles that the protests, which have not been stopped by state repression, are becoming a focal point for far broader social grievances and anti-capitalist sentiments.

The protest movement has been fueled by the worsening conditions confronting all sections of the working class—black and white, native born and immigrant—exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic and the indifference of the government and big business to the suffering and death of workers.

The priorities of American capitalism have been starkly revealed. On the one side are the deaths of nearly 110,000 people from COVID-19, most of which would have been avoided had basic containment measures been carried out when called for by the World Health Organization. The rate of infections and deaths will accelerate as a result of the drive to send workers back to unsafe workplaces in order to resume pumping out profits for the corporations. This is combined with

the loss of 40 million jobs, many of them lost for good, and the spread of hunger and homelessness.

On the other side are the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street and the resulting stock market bonanza, which have added \$434 billion to the wealth of US billionaires.

Bezos’ concern over “pain and emotional trauma” does not extend to his own workers, of all races, at Amazon. He has forced them to choose between staying home without sick pay or an income, or going back into infected warehouses where at least eight workers have died from COVID-19, and bringing the deadly disease back home to their families.

Like Walmart, Kroger, Rite-Aid and many other companies, Amazon and Amazon-owned Whole Foods have canceled the \$2 an hour “hazard pay” bonus for their “essential” workers, leaving them in even deeper poverty. At the same time, Bezos—the world’s richest man—has seen his personal fortune rise by at least \$36.4 billion since the pandemic began, just ahead of Facebook CEO Zuckerberg, who has become \$25 billion richer.

The Wall Street titans were not to be outdone in their professed concern of over injustice. Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, said, “[W]e are watching, listening and want every single one of you to know we are committed to fighting against racism and discrimination wherever and however it exists.”

Notwithstanding their professed concerns about the plight of minorities, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Bank of America, Wells Fargo and other financial institutions made billions by preying on low-income minority and working class households during the subprime mortgage swindle. After the 2008 crash, which led to a wave of foreclosures, job losses and economic devastation, the banks and their criminal executives were bailed out by the Bush and Obama administrations. This theft of public funds is now being eclipsed by the \$6 trillion bailout enacted in the bipartisan CARES Act, signed by Trump in March.

In a blog post titled “I can’t breathe,” Mark Mason, Citigroup Inc.’s chief financial officer, wrote: “Even though I’m the CFO of a global bank, the killings of George Floyd in

Minnesota, Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky are reminders of the dangers Black Americans like me face in living our daily lives.”

Mason, who has an annual salary of \$7.7 million and an estimated net worth of nearly \$1 billion, is part of the layer of African Americans brought into the highest echelons of corporate America and the political establishment over the last half-century. What Mason and his fellow black bourgeois really fear is a united movement of workers and young people of all races that would threaten their wealth and power.

In an email to employees Monday, Ford Executive Chairman Bill Ford and CEO Jim Hackett acknowledged the “pain” of African American workers at Ford, saying, “We cannot turn a blind eye to it or accept some sense of ‘order’ that’s based on oppression.” They added, “As long as so many of our colleagues, our friends, live with that fear, how can we live with ourselves? As long as we have the privilege to breathe, it’s on all of us to summon new levels of empathy and humanity.”

General Motors CEO Mary Barra sent a letter to employees on Saturday, declaring, “I am both impatient and disgusted by the fact that as a nation, we seem to be placated by the passive discussion of ‘why.’ Let’s stop asking ‘why’ and start asking ‘what.’ What are we going to do?”

According to *Automotive News*, Barra said she will “commission and chair an inclusion advisory board of internal and external leaders” by the end of this quarter, with the “long-term goal of inspiring GM to be the most inclusive company in the world.”

Barra’s dismissal of any examination of the root causes of police brutality and racism—the “why’s”—serves definite class interests. It is a matter of historical fact that the American ruling class has long used racism, xenophobia and other reactionary conceptions to divide and weaken the working class.

Henry Ford was a racist, anti-Semite and admirer of Adolf Hitler, who returned the admiration. His efforts to provoke anti-black hatred by hiring poor Southern blacks as strikebreakers was defeated only by the socialists who led the fight for new industrial unions during the Depression.

In its effort to block the unionization of its industrial empire, GM employed the Black Legion, a fascist organization considered even more violent than the KKK. The Black Legion was notorious for kidnapping and murdering blacks, socialists and labor organizers.

Throughout US history, the capitalist class has employed police and military violence in response to any movement perceived to be a threat to its interests in the US and around the world. Imperialist wars coincided with the “labor wars” that lasted from the late 1800s to the late 1900s. National Guard troops suppressed urban uprisings and anti-war protests in the 1960s.

Following the upheavals against police violence and poverty

in the 1960s, the ruling class brought black mayors into power in Detroit, Los Angeles, Gary, Newark and other major cities. Affirmative Action programs were used to promote “black capitalism” and enrich a layer of privileged African Americans.

The police forces were integrated. But the addition of more black executives, business owners, union officials, judges, mayors, police chiefs and even a US president did nothing to stop the exploitation and oppression of black workers and the entire working class.

On the contrary, GM, Ford and Chrysler have shut down hundreds of factories since 1979, ravaging cities like Detroit, Flint and many others, while demanding corporate tax cuts that robbed schools and other vital social services of funding. Police violence continued and intensified, because its real source is ever-rising social inequality, requiring ever more brutal forms of police terror on behalf of the corporate oligarchy.

Today, economic polarization is greater within the black population than in the US population as a whole, and the conditions of African American workers are worse than they were a half century ago.

In an effort to defend their wealth and property, the corporate chiefs are now preaching “inclusiveness,” even as they back the state repression of protesters. “Inclusiveness” is a code word for the promotion of more blacks, Hispanics and women into high-paying positions on the corporate ladder. As for the workers of all races, the conditions will only get worse. The companies will make use of the pandemic-triggered depression to carry out a vast restructuring of social relations. This will entail the permanent destruction of millions of jobs and spread of part-time, temporary and contingent labor.

The CEOs’ hollow professions of opposition to racism and injustice are a smokescreen to obscure their stepped-up offensive against the working class.



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