

Who is responsible for starvation and rising food prices?

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At the prompting of the Biden administration, the world's capitalist politicians, CEOs and bought-off journalists have let flow a deluge of crocodile tears over the global food crisis, which they claim was singlehandedly created by Vladimir Putin.

Addressing a well-fed crowd at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Monday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen professed a newfound concern for the “fragile countries and vulnerable populations” that will “suffer most” from rising food prices. The crowd of billionaires applauded self-righteously when the former German defense minister blamed Russia for “shamefully” profiting off of hunger. Heads nodded gravely when she urged the audience to provide “the World Food Program with the supplies it badly needs” to alleviate the threat of mass starvation.

Rank hypocrisy. Six months ago, UN World Food Program President David Beasley issued a “one time appeal to billionaires to help fight famine,” which explained that if the world's richest people donated a mere \$6.6 billion of their collective \$13.1 trillion in wealth (or 0.04 percent of the total), world hunger could be eliminated in 2022 and millions of lives could be saved.

This request predictably fell on deaf ears, and in the next six months, in a modern world of breathtaking technological progress, 4.5 million human beings died in the most ancient way imaginable. Every year 9 million people starve to death with hardly any attention from the capitalist media, which only drags up the dead when trawling for war propaganda.

The real source of mass starvation and world hunger is capitalism. This week, Oxfam issued a report detailing the massive growth of social inequality over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed 20 million people. Oxfam reported that one new billionaire “has been minted on average every 30 hours during the pandemic,” including 62 individuals who made their money profiting off of rising food prices in the agribusiness industry. “Corporations and the billionaire dynasties who control so much of our food system are seeing their profits soar,” the report read.

For example, when von der Leyen denounced Vladimir Putin for “using hunger and grain to wield power,” there were two men in attendance—David MacLennan, CEO of Cargill, and Brian Sikes, the company's COO—who may have joined in the applause. But according to the Oxfam report, the combined wealth of the Cargill family increased by \$14.4 billion since the start of the pandemic, enough to feed the world's hungry *twice* and *still* have billions left over.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, there is no limit to the number of lives the capitalist class will sacrifice rather than part with even the smallest fraction of its wealth. The architects of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia are similarly prepared to sacrifice the lives of billions of working people—both through hunger and nuclear catastrophe—in order to subjugate Russia and conquer its wealth.

As for the present rise in food prices, the US government and its imperialist allies are primarily responsible. Joe Biden has repeatedly stated that the US government's aim is to ensure a “long and painful war,” and the spike in food prices is in large part a response to US-led sanctions. As a result of the prolongation of the war, as the foreign minister of Egypt told the *Financial Times*, “millions will die.”

One industry expert told the UN Security Council last week, “This is seismic. We stand the risk of an extraordinary amount of human suffering.” According to a May 23 report by the Eurasia Group, 400 million people have been made food insecure in just 90 days, bringing the total to a staggering 1.6 billion. The same report explains that if the war continues, global food prices will rise 45 percent this year, an unprecedented increase.

The \$40 billion military aid bill passed by the US Congress this month is intentionally aimed at prolonging the war and will massively intensify the food crisis by interrupting planting seasons. The pennies that the bill directs for “humanitarian” aid are mere window dressing. Almost all of it will end up in the pockets of corrupt officials and criminals, just like the “aid” provided by the US during

the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Every politician and every organization which supported this bill has voted to take food out of the mouths of millions of working people across the world. This includes Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar and Jamaal Bowman, the Democratic Socialists of America, and international “left” groups like the International Socialist League, the French New Anti-Capitalist Party and the world’s Green parties. In their support for the war, they have indelibly marked themselves as enemies of the working class, for whom the war is having a catastrophic impact.

The intensification of the food crisis is throwing masses of workers into the class struggle. Massive levels of social inequality and the constant pumping of money into the financial markets have created runaway inflation that is driving up the costs of all products and basic necessities.

David Beasley, the director of the World Food Program, recently warned, “We are already seeing riots and protesting taking place as we speak—Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan, Peru. We’ve seen destabilizing dynamics already in the Sahel from Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad. These are only signs of things to come.”

Mass protests have now broken out across Iran, where a 300 percent hike in flour-based staples has provoked demonstrations coinciding with strikes of workers in cities like Tehran, with a population of 8.5 million. Ongoing protests and strikes of a nationwide character continue to take place in Sri Lanka, Peru and elsewhere.

In every country, the trade unions serve to brake the class struggle and bar workers from waging a united struggle to meet urgent social needs.

In Tunisia, the main union confederation was forced to announce preparations for a general strike in order to stave off the specter of mass wildcat action. Health care workers across the Eastern Cape of South Africa went on strike without the approval of the trade unions this month as a result of rising food prices and the disastrous impact of the pandemic on the health care system. Bus drivers in Cordoba, Argentina initiated a wildcat strike over food and other living costs.

This movement is not isolated to the developing world. Baggage handlers in Copenhagen launched a wildcat strike last weekend over the rising cost of food and other basic necessities. According to the Danish press, “The Danish labor court on Sunday ruled that baggage staff must resume work again on Monday, but that was not complied with.” Aircraft workers in Saint-Nazaire, France have launched wildcat walkouts on a daily basis over wages and increases to the cost of living.

In Britain, the Bank of England has called the cost-of-

living crisis “apocalyptic.” Workers are grappling with 9 percent inflation and a record 54 percent rise in gas and electricity bills. According to an Ipsos poll, 85 percent of Britons are concerned about the impact of rising living costs in the next six months.

In this explosive context, the wildcat strike by 1,000 workers at several oil and gas rigs in the North Sea demanding massive pay increases to account for the rising cost of living is a powerful sign that workers view the trade unions as obstacles—not facilitators—in the fight against the rising cost of living. Though the strike was subjected to a corporate media blackout, one industry news report noted, “The wage revolution has started—we are not singling out one company but industry world-wide as a whole.”

There is no way to address the cost-of-living crisis or the global food crisis within the framework of an individual struggle against one employer or company, no matter how militant. In the fight for affordable food and basic necessities and a massive increase in wages, the working class must unite across workplaces, across industries and across countries to harness its full strength.

The fight is a political struggle against the entire capitalist class and the governments they control. It cannot be won without stopping the imperialist war, which drains humanity’s technological genius and industrial might, directing it toward death and destruction when it is desperately needed to save and improve lives everywhere. This requires socialist revolution, the expropriation of the wealth of the rich and the placing of the world’s productive forces under the democratic control of the working class to abolish hunger and want forever.

We urge all workers interested in joining this international movement of the working class to contact the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWARFC) today.



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