

Amazon's former CEO Jeff Bezos clashes with Biden on social media, denounces taxes on the wealthy and stimulus payments

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In a widely publicized feud on Twitter, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos denounced President Joe Biden over the latter's social media comments which claimed that making sure "the wealthiest corporations pay their fair share" of taxes was a good way to lower inflation.

Bezos, the second wealthiest man on earth, denounced Biden, claiming his administration "tried hard to inject even more stimulus into an already over-heated, inflationary economy and only Manchin saved them from themselves," a reference to Biden's failed social spending bill from last fall which the Democratic West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin had refused to support.

"Raising corp taxes is fine to discuss," Bezos added, but "taming inflation is critical." Perhaps sensing these callous denunciations of stimulus measures which kept millions out of poverty and destitution during the first year of the pandemic would not be popular, Bezos concluded his tweet by declaring, "Inflation is a regressive tax that most hurts the least affluent."

Both sides of this public debate are engaged in self-serving lies. First of all, there is the outrageous claim by Bezos, which triggered an angry response from Twitter users, that he is even the least bit interested in the fortunes of the "least affluent." Bezos' net worth, currently at \$165 billion, is based upon the brutal exploitation of more than a million workers in Amazon's warehouses worldwide. Amazon is a pioneer in the use of robotics and electronic surveillance to enforce unsafe levels of work rates which have led to widespread injuries among its workforce, who earn poverty wages.

Bezos denounces Biden for "stimulus money," but almost all the of the pandemic stimulus has gone not to workers or to social programs but to benefit Wall Street and wealthy individuals such as Bezos. Even the corporate press was compelled to acknowledge this. In its

report on the exchange, CNN noted, that "Bezos certainly knows" that the Fed "unleashed a flood of easy money while cutting interest rates to near zero to prevent an economic collapse" in the initial stages of the pandemic. Amazon was "arguably the largest beneficiary of" this policy, which the article states "neither [Bezos or Biden] seems keen to mention."

Indeed, neither can acknowledge this because this would be admitting that the entire policy in response to the pandemic, first under Trump and then under Biden, has been to funnel trillions of dollars into Wall Street while rejecting as "too costly" elementary public health measures, carried out successfully in China, to stop the pandemic. Over a million Americans have been sacrificed to private profit, while hundreds of thousands continue to get sick every day in large workplaces such as Amazon warehouses.

At any rate, that small sliver of stimulus which went to keep workers out of poverty has long since been allowed by the Democrats to dry up. In its place a new policy is under way aimed at attacking workers' living standards.

Bezos' reference to the burden of "inflation," currently at 40-year highs, is disingenuous. The type of inflation which Bezos and the American oligarchs are concerned with is not the rising cost of food, fuel and rent but the far more modest rise in *wages*, which have risen by 4 percent over the course of the last year. This is why the Biden administration has shut off stimulus money to workers and, through the Federal Reserve, is raising interest rates. They are deliberately emulating the "Volcker Shock" of the 1970s, when then-Fed chair Paul Volcker hiked interest rates in order to trigger mass unemployment, to use as a weapon against workers' wage increases.

Biden's self-serving demagoguery about corporations "paying their fair share" is aimed at covering up the fact

that his administration is pursuing policies aimed at forcing *workers* to bear the cost of the crisis by reducing them to the level of industrial serfs.

The Biden administration is a government of, by and for the capitalist ruling class. Biden himself is a longstanding capitalist politician from the state of Delaware, which is so heavily used as a tax haven by US corporations that there are more registered businesses in the state than residents.

But this class finds itself increasingly isolated from and hated by the broad mass of the population. Capitalism is incompatible with a progressive solution to a single major social problem. None of the policies offered by either party have any popular support outside of more privileged layers, and therefore cannot even be presented in an honest way to the public. Instead, official politics is dominated by lies and backroom conspiracies.

Millions are coming to understand that it is the capitalists' selfish profit interests which have caused massive and avoidable suffering during the pandemic, and which are driving the reckless provocations against Russia and the danger of nuclear war. This creates the possibility of a mass movement centered in the working class which can escape their weakening control over the situation.

The central domestic problem which the Biden administration faces is how to develop a basis, if not genuine popular support for pro-corporate policies, at least to prevent and contain the outbreak of opposition to them. A central element of this strategy is the promotion of the corrupt, pro-capitalist trade unions and the growing together between the union bureaucracy and the government. Over the past year, the unions have played a central role in suppressing strikes and enforcing sellout contracts. As a result, wages for unionized workers increased only 3.3 percent last year, far lower than for nonunion workers.

As part of his pledge to be the "most pro-union president in American history," Biden has deliberately singled out Amazon, whose massive, exploited and increasingly restive workforce occupy a critical position in the American economy. Over the last year, Biden has publicly endorsed campaigns to unionize the company.

Recently, he met for a photo-op with Chris Smalls, the head of the Amazon Labor Union, which won a recent union election at an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island, which he hopes to use to provide his corporatist union strategy with a veneer of credibility. Biden has supplemented this with several verbal attacks on Amazon and Jeff Bezos such as that which prompted the recent

exchange.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has written, Amazon, "doubtless intoxicated by wealth and profits hardly preceded in world history ... resents what it must view as trespassing by the Biden administration and the union bureaucracy on its property." Despite this, "if a union were to be brought in, Amazon would adapt and integrate the union into its apparatus, just as it has in Europe."

For Biden, more is involved at Amazon than getting in front of opposition from Amazon workers, as important as this is. Amazon occupies a major and central role in the American economy and Bezos is a figure so wealthy that he is an economic ecosystem unto himself, placing him and other super-rich individuals, such as Elon Musk, outside of any meaningful political control.

On Bezos' supposed "right" to hoard massive levels of wealth, Biden has no quibble. But under conditions of mounting economic crisis, the growing threat of opposition from below and preparations for world war, the last of which requires the full mobilization of America's economic industrial resources, the capitalist ruling class as a whole needs to be able to bring even powerful individual members of its class into line. Biden hopes to be able to accomplish through the development of a corporatist labor-management-government structure at Amazon, the type that already exists in other critical infrastructure, such as on the docks and the railroads.

The working class cannot take one side or another in this conflict between Bezos and the Biden administration, but must develop its own independent policy in opposition to the entire structure of capitalist rule. This requires the development of a revolutionary socialist program, which bases the fight against Amazon not on fruitless appeals to the government but on the mobilization of the working class in a broader fight against capitalism and inequality.



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