

One in five Canadians eating less due to food price rises, as Liberal government squanders billions on war

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A recent survey commissioned by Food Banks Canada revealed that a growing number of Canadians report they are facing hunger and food insecurity due to rising inflation and housing costs. Inflation hit a three-decade high in April, reaching almost seven percent.

The survey, conducted by Mainstreet Research, shows that one in five, an estimated 7 million Canadians, now report going hungry—with 23 percent reporting that they are eating less “than they think they should” because they do not have enough money for food. The percentage among those earning less than \$50,000 per year who are eating less was almost double the overall average.

Food banks across Canada typically see an easing of demand during the summer months, but this year there has been no sign of slow-downs. “Food banks in most regions of Canada are experiencing an influx of Canadians visiting food banks for the first time—a number that’s increased by up to 25 percent in some regions, which we haven’t seen since the first few months of the pandemic,” stated Kirsten Beardsley, Food Banks Canada’s CEO.

“The biggest sign that inflation is seriously impacting hunger and food insecurity in Canada, is that the reason why people say they are coming to food banks is changing,” Beardley noted. “In the past, people would turn to food banks during times of job loss, or due to lower wages—but over the past six months, Canadians are telling us that they are running out of money for food because of rising housing, gas, energy and food costs.”

Statistics Canada reports that consumers paid 9.7 percent more for groceries in April compared with a year ago, the largest year-on-year increase since September 1981. Pasta prices were up 19.6 percent, cereal products rose 13.9 percent, bread increased 12.2 percent and fresh fruit costs jumped 10 percent.

Speaking to CBC News, Breanna Cordeiro of Oakville, Ontario, said the rising price of gas combined with stagnant wages has forced her family to find ways to economize. “Where you look at budgeting, it’s like, where can we make some cuts?” she said. “And unfortunately, sometimes it has to be food.” Opting for more meatless meals and stocking up on groceries based largely on what is on sale goes so far, but even then, the mother of two said it can be tough. “The flyer comes out every Wednesday or Thursday, and it’s like, ‘This is on sale? This is the sale price? That’s what you used to pay full price, even six months ago,’” she said.

The Stop Community Food Centre, a Toronto food bank, cannot keep up with the growing number of people arriving hungry at its doors, and has been forced to reduce how much food it gives to each person. The food bank’s three locations currently serve about 400 meals a day—a 40 percent increase from 2019. During the pandemic, it allowed families to collect groceries twice a month, but they have been forced to change that policy. Maria Rio, director of development and communications, told The Breach, “With food costs and an increase in new clients, this became harder and harder to maintain so now we are back to once-a-month access per household.”

The grocery business in Canada is monopolized by five large corporations: Loblaws, Costco, Sobeys, Metro and Walmart, which control over 60 percent of retail market food sales. Every major chain has squeezed their customers and their employees. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) economist David Macdonald reports that grocery stores “booked \$7.3 billion in pre-tax profit in 2021.” That’s “more than double what they were clearing the year before the pandemic,” according to Macdonald.

The skyrocketing profits for big business on the one

hand and stagnant wages for workers on the other as the cost of food and other basic necessities surge are not merely the product of economic forces, but the intended outcome of the policies pursued by the establishment political parties and the trade unions for decades.

The unions have enforced one round of concessions after another on workers, while systematically sabotaging their struggles against real-terms pay cuts, the gutting of benefits like cost-of-living adjustments, and the destruction of jobs. All political parties, from the New Democrats on the “left” to the Tories on the right, have presided over a low-tax, deregulated regime that has proven to be a bonanza for the super-rich and major corporations.

These longstanding developments were dramatically accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal Liberal government, supported by the unions and NDP, handed over \$650 billion to the financial markets and major banks overnight to protect their vast wealth, while forcing workers to remain on the job in dangerous conditions as the deadly virus spread.

With inflation surging over recent months, workers have been straining against the straitjacket imposed on them by the unions and have waged militant struggles for wage increases and improved working conditions. These struggles include 40,000 Ontario construction workers, more than 20,000 New Brunswick public sector workers, and rail workers at Canadian Pacific.

Aware of the anger building up among working people, the New Democrats have absurdly sought to portray themselves in a series of demagogic statements as friends of workers.

On June 8, New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh posted a video on TikTok and Instagram of himself speaking in the House of Commons about the struggle faced by growing numbers of workers to feed themselves. “One out of every four Canadians in this country is going hungry because they cannot afford groceries. At the same time, corporations are making record profits. They’re breaking record after record. Our plan is to tax the excess profits,” Singh claimed.

Nobody can take such cynical posturing seriously. Singh’s NDP has been propping up the minority Liberal government since 2019 with the full support of the trade union bureaucracy. It backed the Trudeau government’s bailout of the super-rich at the beginning of the pandemic and the back-to-work campaign, which was aimed at making working people pay for the hundreds of billions of dollars made available to the banks and major

corporations. At the same time, all NDP MPs have backed Liberal budgets that have included billions of additional dollars in funding for Canada’s military.

In March of this year the NDP signed a “confidence-and-supply” agreement that will keep Justin Trudeau’s Liberal minority government in office through June 2025. The NDP and its backers in the unions explicitly hailed the deal as necessary to ensure “political stability,” allowing Canada to continue playing a major role in the imperialist powers’ war against Russia.

As the WSWS explained at the time, “The specific task of the NDP and their union allies will be to suppress worker struggles, while providing the Liberals with ‘left’ cover as the government pursues imperialist aggression and pivots to renewed austerity and “growing the economy”—a euphemism for a raft of pro-business policies from deregulation to privatization.”

The inflation rate has been spiraling upward for more than a year as the economic costs of the failure to end the pandemic, and the massive handouts to wealthy corporations, are imposed on the working class by the ruling elite’s policies. For more than two years, the NDP has collaborated with the unions and the Liberals to suppress strikes and deny legitimate wage demands, while promoting Canada’s imperialist ambitions around the world.

Yves Giroux, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, recently released a report stating the federal government would need to spend an additional \$75.3 billion on defence over the next five years for Canada to reach NATO’s target of spending two percent of GDP on defence. Based on government figures, Giroux forecasts that Canada’s total military spending will increase from \$36.3 billion in the 2022-23 fiscal year to approximately \$51 billion in 2026-27.

Notwithstanding Singh’s blather about taxing the corporations, his party is the fifth wheel in a government that is committed to ensuring that the funds needed to fund Canada’s massive rearmament program will come from gutting what remains of the social safety net and ratcheting up the exploitation of the working class.



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