

Trump to American workers: Let them pay for the war

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On the eve of the French Revolution, the ill-fated queen Marie Antoinette is said to have responded to reports that the peasantry could not afford bread with the remark: “Let them eat cake.” The story is almost certainly apocryphal, but it captured the moment—the arrogance and cluelessness of an aristocracy that had lost all connection to the conditions of life of the masses, even as it presided over mounting social misery and the approach of revolution.

Donald Trump’s statement this week belongs in the same historical register. Asked whether he considered the impact of the US war against Iran on “Americans’ financial situations,” the bloated gangster-president replied, “Not even a little bit.”

There are moments where the reality of social relations are made clear, and Trump’s statement is one of them. He made his comments as he was leaving the White House to travel to Beijing for a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Trump tried to frame his remarks in the context of the danger of an Iranian nuclear weapon. “The only thing that matters when I’m talking about Iran—they can’t have a nuclear weapon. I don’t think about Americans’ financial situation. I don’t think about anybody,” he said.

The imminent danger of an Iranian atomic bomb has been the “big lie” peddled by the White House since the beginning of the war. The threat is universally dismissed by commentators with any knowledge of Iran, as well as by the US military-intelligence apparatus. There is no reason to believe that Trump believes this fairy tale either—especially given that he claimed that last summer’s airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities had “totally obliterated” them.

That leaves Trump’s declaration that he does not care about the impact of the Iran war on the cost of living for American working people to stand on its own. He said it, and he meant it. The American ruling class demands that

the working class pay the cost of this war.

Trump’s claim that he doesn’t think about the financial position of *any* American is of course a lie. He thinks constantly about the financial position of the billionaire oligarchs, his sole constituency, the social layer which spawned him. This was on display as Air Force One landed in Beijing, carrying Trump and many top aides, as well as a Who’s Who of American capitalists—Elon Musk, Apple’s Tim Cook, Jensen Huang of Nvidia, Larry Fink of BlackRock, Stephen Schwarzman of Blackstone, Boeing CEO Robert Ortberg, Citigroup CEO Jane Fraser, and CEOs of Cargill, GE Aerospace, Goldman Sachs, Micron Technology, Qualcomm, Visa and others.

The combined net worth of Trump’s entourage of oligarchs, which required two planes to accommodate, is over \$1 trillion.

While Trump seeks to cut deals that will enrich Wall Street and Silicon Valley, working people are being crushed by a renewed surge in the cost of living. Real wages fell in April as prices outstripped paychecks. Energy costs—driven in large part by the Iran war and the disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz—have been a major accelerant. Headline inflation rose to 3.8 percent in April, up from 3.3 percent in March, the highest since 2023. Gasoline prices jumped 28 percent, and fuel oil surged 54 percent. Even excluding food and energy, core inflation climbed to 2.8 percent, up from 2.6 percent the month before.

The shock is now rippling through the entire supply chain and into grocery bills. The Labor Department reported that wholesale prices rose 6 percent in April, the largest jump in three years, as higher fuel and transport costs are passed along before reaching consumers. Core producer prices, excluding food and energy, were 5.2 percent higher than a year earlier. Diesel fuel—the lifeblood of trucking and shipping—soared 12.6 percent in April. Food inflation, with NBC reporting that grocery

prices jumped in April, was reflected in the price of fresh vegetables, which are over 44 percent more expensive than three months ago on an annualized basis.

These runaway price hikes are colliding with stepped-up layoffs, particularly those tied to AI-driven restructuring—an ominous combination historically associated with “stagflation.” Compounding the crisis is Trump’s tariff war against virtually every country in the world, which is disrupting supply chains and pushing up the price of imported goods.

Even in his brief remarks to reporters Tuesday, Trump made clear that his sole concern in terms of the economy is the financial markets. “The most important thing by far—including whether our stock market, which, by the way, is at an all-time high—but including whether our stock market goes up or down a little bit, the most important thing by far is Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon,” he said, adding, “Every American understands.”

Actually, opinion polls show overwhelming popular opposition to Trump, both on the war against Iran and on the economic disaster that flows from it. Two-thirds of Americans oppose Trump’s launching of the war, while 70 percent told a CNN-SSRS survey they disapproved of Trump’s handling of the economy—20 points worse than at any time in his first term. Some 77 percent said Trump’s policies were responsible for the rising cost of living, including even a majority of Republican voters.

Congressional Democrats seized on Trump’s remarks with the practiced indignation of people who think politics is a branch of theater. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries declared Wednesday, “Donald Trump has made clear that he and the Republican Party don’t give a damn about the personal finances of the American people. It’s an extraordinary admission.” Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, the senator from Wall Street, then posed in front of a giant blowup of Trump’s quote to denounce the president as “uncaring,” as if the problem were a shortage of empathy.

No one should be fooled by this performance. It was the Democratic administration of Joe Biden that helped touch off rampant inflation by pumping trillions into the financial system to bail out banks and speculators during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, while pouring hundreds of billions into the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. The Democrats are not horrified by the policy. They are annoyed that Trump says the quiet part out loud.

While there are tactical differences within the ruling

class, particularly elements of foreign policy, there is no disagreement between the two capitalist parties on making the working class pay for the crisis and escalating war.

Trump made demagogic promises to halt rising prices and shrinking paychecks in his 2024 presidential campaign, and the Democrats seek to do the same in the 2026 midterms. But both parties defend the interests of the giant corporations, banks and billionaire oligarchs, not the working people who are the vast majority of the country.

The oligarchy is on a rampage. Trump’s crude indifference is the concentrated expression of a class outlook and a program of social counter-revolution. Everything is on the table. At the beginning of April he declared: “Don’t send any money for daycare,” because “we’re fighting wars.” Washington, he insisted, should stop worrying about “Medicaid, Medicare, all these individual things” and focus on “one thing, military protection.”

Trump speaks for a political order permeated through and through with oligarchy. As the WSWS remarked in relation to the wealth-infested Met Gala earlier this month, “Expropriation of the mega-millionaires and billionaires is a social necessity. The United States is controlled by an oligarchic ruling class that is as shameless as it is brutal. It has rendered itself intolerable by its own conduct. Society cannot afford the rich.”

There is an enormous social anger erupting in the United States and internationally—over soaring prices, mass layoffs, war and the open contempt of the oligarchy for the lives of working people. The rampage of the oligarchy has its corollary. Future historians will describe it as an inevitability: social revolution.



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