

# Jeff Bezos' \$100 billion: The case for expropriation

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27 November 2017

After a Black Friday surge in Amazon's stock value, CEO Jeff Bezos' wealth surpassed the \$100 billion mark, making him over \$10 billion dollars richer than the world's second wealthiest man, Microsoft CEO Bill Gates.

The rise of the \$100 billion man is a further milestone in the unprecedented growth of social inequality worldwide. Bezos' wealth would make the robber barons of the 19th century green with envy.

In November, the Institute for Policy Studies found the three wealthiest billionaires owned as much as the poorest half of the United States. Thanks to Bezos, this study is already out of date, because the billionaire increased his wealth by roughly \$20 billion since its publication. Worldwide, the five richest billionaires own as much wealth as half the world's population, some 3.5 billion people.

Bezos acquired his wealth through the exploitation of his 300,000-strong international workforce. Amazon workers make as little as \$233 per month in India, to an average of just \$12.40 an hour in the United States. Workers toil for long hours with minimal safety protections, very limited benefits, and often in temporary or "flex" positions. In September, when 59-year-old Phillip Terry was crushed by a forklift at an Amazon facility near Indianapolis, the Department of Labor said the company might be forced to pay \$28,000 in fines. Bezos makes this much each minute, more than his US employees make in a full year.

The company demands tribute from governments worldwide, requiring billions in tax breaks and free handouts in exchange for building its warehouses. Amazon is bringing back the "company town" of the late 19th century. It has forced over 200 American cities into a bidding war to lure the company's second headquarters with massive handouts. Chicago, for example, offered Amazon a \$2.25 billion "incentive package," while

Stonecrest, Georgia's city council voted to change its name to "Amazon" and appoint Bezos as "mayor for life" if the company grants them the second headquarters.

Bezos has transformed his corporation into a semi-official organ of the US military-intelligence apparatus. Just this month, Amazon and the CIA announced the launching of a new "Secret Region" cloud system where the company will host data for the CIA, NSA, Defense Department, and other military-intelligence agencies.

A CIA spokesman recently called the 2013 \$600 million deal between Amazon and the government "the best decision we ever made." Earlier in November, the Senate approved a \$700 billion defense spending bill that included an "e-commerce portal" amendment guaranteeing that Amazon will supply the military-intelligence apparatus with computers, chairs and other office supplies.

The \$100 billion man has wielded his wealth to curry tremendous influence in the halls of power. Amazon has spent over \$9.6 million lobbying the federal government this year. Bezos has used the pages of the *Washington Post*, which he bought in 2013, to advance the Democratic Party's agenda. The *Post*, under Bezos' direction, has been a foremost advocate of the campaign against Russia, publishing in November 2016 the "PropOrNot" list, a false compilation of alleged "Russian propaganda" news agencies that included left-wing news web sites.

While Bezos accumulates a personal fortune by colluding with the military-intelligence agencies, the material needs of growing numbers of people are going unmet.

The UN estimates that it would cost \$30 billion to solve world hunger by providing 862 million people with food for a year. The World Health Organization claims just \$11 billion is needed to halve the number of people without access to clean water. Another UN study found that \$26 billion would provide education to every child that does

not receive one .

The Guttmacher Institute estimates that with \$13 billion, free maternal and prenatal care could be provided for every mother in the developing world. It would cost \$11 billion to house each of the 150,000 people who are homeless on a given night in the US. The cost of preventing 4 million malaria deaths would be \$6 billion each year.

The total cost for these essential changes would be roughly \$97 billion.

The accumulation of such immense wealth is proof that the conditions for the socialist transformation of the world are pregnant in the present situation.

In 1880, Friedrich Engels wrote in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* that for socialists, the abolition of classes is not a utopian dream. Rather, it “presupposes, therefore, the development of production carried out to a degree at which appropriation of the means of production and of the products, and, with this, of political domination...by a particular class of society, has become not only superfluous but economically, politically, intellectually, a hindrance to development.”

Engels continued: “The socialized appropriation of the means of production does away, not only with the present artificial restrictions upon production, but also with the positive waste and devastation of productive forces and products that are at the present time the inevitable concomitants of production, and that reach their height in the crises. Further, it sets free for the community at large a mass of means of production and of products, by doing away with the senseless extravagance of the ruling classes of today, and their political representatives. The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day-by-day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties—this possibility is now, for the first time, here, but *it is here*.”

Even more so today. The technological advances of the past quarter century and the international integration of the world economy have become weapons in the hands of massive corporations that control the world and its governments. On the one hand, the private ownership of these corporations facilitates the concentration of wealth. On the other hand, the contradiction between the global character of the world economy and the nation-state system is everywhere erupting in the form of war, dictatorship, and the expulsion of tens of millions of

refugees from their homes.

The Socialist Equality Party demands that the major corporations be placed under international social control to be organized democratically by the workers themselves to meet the needs of society.

The vast wealth of the financial oligarchy, expressed in their ownership of massive corporations, must be seized and expropriated, while the complex technologies, supply chains, and advanced transportation systems must be integrated in an organized, planned manner to harness the anarchic force of the world economy and eliminate material scarcity.

Amazon is a prime example. Its supply lines and delivery systems could distribute goods across the world, bringing water, food, and medicine from each producer according to his or her ability, to each consumer according to his or her need.

The massively sophisticated computational power used by the technology companies to censor and blacklist political opposition could instead be used for logistical analysis to conduct rescue and rebuilding missions in disaster zones like Houston and Puerto Rico. Drones used in the battlefield could be scrapped and rebuilt to distribute supplies for building schools, museums, libraries, and theaters, and for making Internet service available at no cost for the entire world.

The ruling class and all of the institutions of the political establishment stand inexorably in the way of efforts to expropriate their wealth. What is required is to mobilize the working class in a political struggle against the state and the socio-economic system on which it is based, through the fight for socialism.



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