**Bill the billionaires**

Jenny Ricks January 23, 2020

Let us be blunt, the World Economic Forum (WEF) happening in Davos this month will not solve the inequality crisis because its participants – the ultra-rich and powerful 1 percent – are the primary beneficiaries of the system that ravages the planet and discards the 99 percent.

We do not need to look far to know how inequality hurts us all. Globally, inequality blights the lives of the majority of the world’s population, while the wealth of the richest people continues to soar. We are truly living in an inequality crisis.

In the US, while the world’s richest man Jeff Bezos moans that he does not know how to spend his vast wealth and talks of colonising the moon, his company Amazon had a tax rebate of $129m on top of paying zero federal income tax in 2019. With the majority of Americans struggling from paycheque to paycheque, this drains money that could have been spent on social services, healthcare and education. And this tax rebate is certainly not ensuring Amazon employees have decent pay and conditions.

The climate emergency shows us the issue of inequality writ large – we are sacrificing the lives of millions of people, mostly the poorest and those living in developing countries, in order for big polluting companies to continue their plunder of our planet. As Australia burns and Indonesia struggles with historic floods, their governments scramble to deny the science and defend the fossil fuel industry.

Our societies are rooted in patriarchy, racism and many other forms of discrimination. Women, especially women of colour, are the hardest hit by rising inequality: They are the workers in the most precarious employment, they suffer the most from cuts in public services, and much of their work, paid and unpaid, is not recognised and rewarded. Our democracies are corroding as power and wealth concentrate in fewer and fewer hands.

While it is easier to think that the soaring wealth of the elites, patriarchy, racism and the climate emergency are separate problems that we should solve independently, the truth is they all stem from the neoliberal economic system that is rigged by and for the 1 percent. Inequality is not just a flaw in the system, it is the core of its design.

The elite’s unlimited greed for wealth and power is taking its toll on the planet and on humanity itself. Human rights will not survive if inequality continues unabated.

Many journalists and commentators dubbed 2019 the “year of protest”. We saw a surge of protest action from people most affected by inequality on a daily basis, as well as a growing climate justice movement.

Collectively, people are protesting and writing a new story where our future will not be up for grabs. Different issues provided a tipping point. In Chile, the massive protests were sparked by a hike in metro fare prices. In France, it was rising fuel prices. In Lebanon, it was a new WhatsApp tax.

Across the globe, youth took to the streets to save the planet from catastrophic climate change because older generations failed to do so. But these protests also spread across society as people connected their grievances to the fact that change needs to be systemic, not just minor reforms.

And if anyone thought the energy and demands of 2019 would be over in this new decade, they were wrong. This January, as the champagne bottles pop in Davos, expect massive street mobilisation to take place in more than 30 countries, including the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Zambia, Kenya, India, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, South Africa, and Mexico. The coordinated global protest will see diverse movements rising up against the root causes of inequality.

The solutions to inequality and the other crises it breeds will not come from the icy mountains of Davos, but the hot, crowded streets of Santiago, Beirut and Manilla. We will take to the street with our demands for better social services, climate justice, minimum living wages, protection of our democracy, LGBTQIA+ rights, gender equality and economic justice. And yes, we are calling for more taxes for the likes of Jeff Bezos. It is time to bill the billionaires for all the chaos and destruction their quest for endless wealth has caused.

When the rich, at least some of them, are calling for their wealth to be taxed more, we know that inequality is out of control. Goodwill from the ultra-rich may seem like good news, but inequality will not be solved by the richest and most powerful people. And it would be naive to think that promises by governments and global institutions and charitable pledges from the ultra-rich will take us out of this crisis. And that is what the WEF is about.

Excerpted from: ‘It is time to bill the billionaires’.

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