

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: 5/1/2020

SL: International Workers' Day, emphasis on *International*

The Takeaway:

- Meatpackers forced to work in the United States, migrant laborers stranded in India, call center employees made to sleep on the ground in the Philippines: the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the extent of the disempowerment of workers everywhere, and is being leveraged to make it even worse.
- Five decades of globalization privileging corporate profits over human wellbeing has led workers around the world to suffer from the same exploitative economic conditions.
- To build a just global economy that works for everyone, workers must come together to build power across borders.

After COVID-19: Building a Global Economy That Works for Workers Everywhere

Bangladesh's garment workers have been abandoned. When the COVID-19 crisis began, brands like *Primark* and *H&M* that contract out their production to the country [canceled](#) future orders, reneged on existing contracts, and refused to pay for those that had already been produced. In an industry already beset by low wages and unsafe working conditions, over a quarter of all workers now find themselves unemployed. The conditions are, according to one industry representative, "[apocalyptic](#)."

Their case is hardly unique. Workers around the world, already caught up in a global economic [system](#) designed to exploit them, have seen their work conditions deteriorate even further in the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. On this May 1 — which, for the first time in over 100 years, will not be met with mass demonstrations — we remember the *international* in International Workers' Day. Workers around the world are in this together. This crisis should serve as both a wake-up call, and an opportunity, to advance one of Win Without War's [Principles of a Progressive Foreign Policy](#): "Ending economic, racial, and gender inequality around the world and dismantling global oligarchy are fundamental to creating a world economy that works for everyone."

The Breaking of International Labor

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In the 1970s, the global economy began a process of restructuring that was designed to break the power of labor. In addition to the suppression of labor movements domestically — most notably under the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the United States and U.K. — an emergent globalization took a form that would unleash a global “[race to the bottom](#)” in labor standards. Through the [unfettering](#) of global capital; [trade deals](#) that enable corporations to work across borders without added labor protections; international loans [conditioned](#) on deregulation; and more, workers in each country became pitted against one another in competition to attract scarce investment. The result? Labor movements around the world saw their power decimated.

Enter COVID-19

Into this unjust system came the COVID-19 crisis, which has fallen most heavily on those already disenfranchised and disadvantaged. Essential workers everywhere are risking their lives to labor through the outbreak. In the United States, industrial meatpackers are now [forced](#) to do so by executive order. In India, migrant workers are [stranded](#) under lockdown. In the Philippines, call center workers are made to [sleep on the floor](#), mere inches from their coworkers. In Mexico, factories are being [pressured](#) to reopen by none other than the U.S. government. While unemployment soars, corporations [receive](#) no-strings-attached bailouts, the Trump administration [weakens](#) labor laws, and the stock market [rebounds](#), laying bare the disconnect between those who are sacrificed to, and those who benefit from, the status quo.

A Chance to Remake the System

The system was already broken. The COVID-19 crisis has only revealed the preexisting faultlines, and provided an [opportunity](#) for further [exploitation](#). But the opportunity runs both ways. The political landscape is never as malleable as it is during a crisis — this moment offers an opportunity to rewrite the rules of the global economy to ensure that workers everywhere see its benefits. That means restructuring our system of [trade and investment](#), establishing global floors on [wages](#) and [labor standards](#), [ending](#) loan conditions that promote deregulation, and, above all, building worker solidarity that [transcends](#) borders.

May Day Action

This May Day, constrained as we are by our circumstances, workers around the world will still make their voices heard. [The People's Bailout](#) is calling for a full day of action. Global unions are [hosting](#) a virtual international May Day. An unprecedented coalition of Amazon, Instacart, Whole Foods, Walmart, Target, and FedEx workers will go on [strike](#). Linking workers' and climate issues, Arm in Arm is [asking](#) for pledges to a mass climate strike in 2022. And much more. As Congresswoman Ilhan Omar recently [said](#): “Your destiny, my destiny, the destiny of workers around the world” — from the garment workers of Bangladesh to the meatpackers of the United States — “are linked.” By taking actions like these, and building a truly [internationalist](#) workers' movement, we can make a global economy that works for everyone.

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For more on the organizations leading the fight for workers everywhere:

- [International Labor Rights Forum](#) is a human rights organization that advances dignity and justice for workers in the global economy;
- [Global Labor Justice](#) is a strategy hub supporting transnational collaboration among worker and migrant organizations to expand labor rights;
- [LabourStart](#) is an online news service which aims to serve the international trade union movement by collecting and disseminating information;
- [Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch](#) fights to ensure that in the era of globalization, a majority have the opportunity to enjoy economic security, a clean environment, safe food, medicines and products, and more;

And, of course, the true leaders in fighting for labor internationalism: workers themselves, represented in global unions like [Public Services International](#) and the [International Trade Union Confederation](#), and domestic but internationally-minded unions like the [United Electrical Workers](#) and the [Communication Workers of America](#).

BURIED LEDES

First, some good news: **Representative Adam Smith — Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee — [indicated](#) agreement with Win Without War's calls** to oppose further appropriation of COVID-19 relief money to the Pentagon.

Senator Ed Markey and Representative Ro Khanna [introduced](#) a bill that would prevent Trump from waging unauthorized war against North Korea — “Congress, not the president, has the power to start, and ultimately fund, a war,” said our Erica Fein in the press release.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute released their [Global Military Expenditures Report for 2019](#), showing that countries spent \$1.917 trillion on their militaries last year — and the United States accounted for 38% of that spending. You can read the joint statement from Win Without War and over 40 other organizations [here](#).

[Statistics published](#) by the Norwegian Refugee Council show that **over 50 million people were internally displaced in 2019** — the highest number of all time.

In her [column](#) on Fellow Travelers Blog, Pam-Campos Palma explains why, to win the election, **Biden must take on a more progressive foreign policy**.

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The World Health Organization isn't perfect. But if we want it to improve, we [should actively engage](#), rather than cutting ties and running away, as *some* people in power have been inclined to do.

Lockdowns and **emergency measures put in place to quell the spread of the coronavirus have been used as [cover](#) for repressive governments** to punish anyone who opposes them.

And finally — did you know that a **mile-wide asteroid [passed by](#) Earth on Wednesday** at nearly 19,000 mph? We thought that was pretty out of this world.