

Adding insult to injury: Bush says starving India eats too much

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May 7, 2008 — Karl Marx, born on 5 May, 1818, nearly two centuries ago, had in 1867 laid bare the intimate connection between the pangs of hunger of the most industrious layers of the working class, and the extravagant consumption, coarse or refined, of the rich, for which capitalist accumulation is the basis'' (Capital Vol. 1, Ch. 25). In May 2008, nearly a century and a half later, as we hear Emperor Bush hold forth on global hunger, we are reminded that capitalism and global wealth remains just as intimately wedded to hunger. The global policeman Bush, in the time-honoured traditions of the backyard bully, has long harboured the habit of dictating to nations who their friends and enemies should be. Now, he has taken to telling nations how much they should eat, and of wagging a disapproving finger at poor nations whose middle class has made some improvements in its diet. Bush's sentiments (and those of his lieutenant Condoleezza Rice) reek of callous contempt for the world's poor. They lay bare the fact that the only perspective Bush and US imperialism is capable of is that of the US corporations. In Bush's words, the growing purchasing power of the middle class in the developing world is good'' because y'know, it's hard to sell products into countries that aren't prosperous'' [See article below], he said on May 3. But, lamented Bush, you start getting wealth, you start demanding better nutrition and better food''. In other words, India's growing appetite was pushing food prices up and causing the rest of the world to go hungry. Unfortunately, the world's people haven't mastered the art of being markets, not mouths: of tightening the belt over their bellies while loosening their purse strings ...

Bush is the head of the nation whose successive governments used its military to ruthlessly batter a long list of Latin American and African countries into being pliant suppliers of cash crops for the US corporations; and in the process devastating the food security of these nations. Major General Smedley Butler has described how, as a US marine, he had been a high class muscle-man for Big Business...a gangster for capitalism'' who had helped to make Honduras, Mexico, Haiti, various Central American republics, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic safe'' for plunder by US fruit, oil, and sugar corporations and banks in the early twentieth century. Washington's latest exploit has been to make Iraq safe'' for US oil corporations, in the process devastating its economy, its infrastructure, and its thriving health and education structures. Now, Bush has the gall to offer in charity what his nation has plundered by military muscle and economic arm-twisting. Like a rapacious wolf dressed up as a kindly and nurturing mother, he describes the US as an unbelievably compassionate and generous nation'' and offers to help the poor countries out by buying food directly from farmers as opposed to giving people food''. So, the deepest desire of the US corporations -- to have the farmers of developing countries as captive and direct producers for them alone -- is projected by Bush as generosity! The US today along with a small and exclusive club of developed'' countries guzzles a disproportionate share of the

world's scarce resources including fuel, paper and food. It is also responsible for a disproportionately high share of global pollution. Although constituting only 5 per cent of the global population, the US emits more carbon dioxide, consumes more paper and other forest products, and produces more municipal waste than any other country. Yet Bush refused to curb carbon emissions in the US, saying the American way of life is not negotiable'', and peddling the absurd theory that cows were more responsible for such emissions than cars, and so countries like China and India ought therefore to bear a greater burden of curbing emissions! Annual per capita foodgrains consumption in the US is over five times that of India, and three times that of China, according to figures released by the US Department of Agriculture for 2007. On average, a US citizen consumes 1046 kg of grain, and around 20 times more meat and fish and 60 times more paper, gasoline and diesel than the average Indian. But in India, since the entry of globalisation, the average per capita consumption of food grain has actually gone down from 177 kg per person to 155 kg per person: which is the same as the hunger levels seen during famine in times of the British Raj. And in India, foodgrains absorption is rising fast for the (mainly urban) middle class, which boosts the national average. A large section of the rural poor are actually reduced to as low as 136 kg per capita per year -- which is the same as that of starvation-hit sub-Saharan Africa. Bush grudges the 350 million-strong Indian middle class its improved diet: he is blithely silent about more than 350 million rural Indians who are below the average food energy intake of sub-Saharan African countries! Studies have shown a long-term tendency towards declining per capita calorie consumption, especially in rural India -- that is, Indians are growing hungrier year after year. Deaths by hunger are an all-too common phenomenon which Indian rulers are united in denying. And these millions owe their hunger directly to the rural job losses, income decline, land grab, slashed government expenditure on rural development, slashed PDS and increased grain exports -- all of which are policies aggressively promoted by the US-backed IMF-World Bank, and faithfully forced on Indian people by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his predecessors. Of course, the actual food consumption of the poor Americans is less than the national average. Hunger and homelessness are a growing phenomenon in the US, the world's richest country. According to the US Department of Agriculture, in 2006 more 35 million people lived in food-insecure households, including 13 million children. Adults living in over 12 million households could not eat balanced meals and in more than 7 million families someone had smaller portions or skipped meals. In close to 5 million families, children did not get enough to eat at some point during the year. This hunger at home is all the more horrific when one knows that more than sufficient food grains are grown in the US -- but is fed to cars as bio-fuel'' rather than to hungry people!

Bush's bratty and bullying arrogance is really nothing new: we expect nothing better. The real question is why Manmohan Singh, our prime minister, describes a man with such contempt for India and for the poor of the world, as ``India's best friend''? Why insist on continuing with US-dictated policies which favour imperialism and force millions of Indians to live in misery and hunger?

* From Links website:

<http://www.links.org.au/node/393>

* Kavita Krishnan is an editorial board member of Liberation, central organ of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) — CPI (ML) Liberation.

Now, Bush blames India for rising food prices

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WASHINGTON: Prosperity in countries like India is “good” but it triggers increased demand for “better nutrition” which in turn leads to higher food prices, US President George W Bush said. (Watch)

The comments come close on the heels of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s controversial statement that “apparent improvement” in the diets of people in India and China and consequent food export caps is among the causes of the current global food crisis.

At an interactive session on economy in Missouri, Bush argued that there are many factors for the present crisis, only one of which was investment on biofuels like ethanol.

“Worldwide there is increasing demand. There turns out to be prosperity in developing world, which is good. It’s going to be good for you because you’ll be selling products in the countries, you know, big countries perhaps, and it’s hard to sell products into countries that aren’t prosperous. In other words, the more prosperous the world is, the more opportunity there is,” the US President said.

“It also, however, increases demand. So, for example, just as an interesting thought for you, there are 350 million people in India who are classified as middle class. That’s bigger than America. Their middle class is larger than our entire population.” And when you start getting wealth, you start demanding better nutrition and better food, and so demand is high, and that causes the price to go up,” he said.

Bush also listed change in weather patterns and increase in basic costs like that of energy as factors contributing to higher food prices.

“No question that ethanol has had a part of it. But I simply do not subscribe to the notion that it is the main cost driver for your food going up,” Bush said.

Several international experts have in recent days held biofuels, until recently cast as a miracle alternative to polluting fossil fuels, for being responsible for usurping arable land and distorting world food prices.

“Actually, the reason why food prices are high now is because, one, energy costs are high, and if you’re a farmer, you’re going to pass on your cost of energy in the products you sell, otherwise you’d go broke.” And when you’re paying more for your diesel, paying more for your fertiliser because it’s got a lot of, you know, natural gas in it, in other words, when your basic costs are going up, so does the cost of food,” Bush said.

He said there are two aspects of rising food prices — its effect on US citizens and the fact that there is a food scarcity in the world.

"We don't have a scarcity issue in America...We got a price issue. Our shelves aren't going empty, it's just costing more money," Bush said.

"There is scarcity in the world, and I happen to believe when we find people who can't find food we ought to help them find it," he said adding, "America is by far the most generous nation when it comes to helping the hungry."

"We're an unbelievably compassionate nation," he said. "I think we ought to change our food policy in Africa and other developing countries...buying food directly from farmers as opposed to giving people food. I think we ought to be saying, 'Why don't we help you be able to deal with scarcity by encouraging your farmers to grow and be efficient growers? Otherwise, we're going to be in this cycle forever.'"

* *From the Times of india:*

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/3006775.cms>