

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos launches \$10 billion climate change fund

By Kevin Reed
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Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the world's wealthiest individual, announced on Monday that he is creating a \$10 billion charitable fund with his own money to address climate change which will start issuing grants as soon as this summer.

In an Instagram post that included a photo of the Earth, the Amazon founder wrote that he was creating the Bezos Earth Fund “to work alongside others both to amplify known ways and to explore new ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change on this planet we all share.”

Bezos also said that the fund would be a “global initiative” that would provide resources to “scientists, activists, NGOs—any effort that offers a real possibility to help preserve and protect the natural world.” He concluded, “We can save Earth. It's going to take collective action from big companies, small companies, nation states, global organizations, and individuals.”

The \$10 billion in philanthropy represents less than eight percent of Bezos's estimated \$130 billion net worth. In the world of billionaire charitable giving, the Amazon CEO would jump to third place behind Warren Buffet, who gave \$36 billion to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2006, and Helen R. Walton, who provided \$16.4 billion to the Walton Family Foundation in 2007.

While there are many questions about the Bezos Earth Fund and how it will operate, one thing is abundantly clear: a significant portion of the \$10 billion fund, if not all of it, will be subsidized by the US tax code. Therefore, Bezos's charitable “global initiative” is in reality a massive American tax shelter that will drain critical government funding.

The launching of the fund is at least in part a response by the Amazon founder to growing protests by employees at the multinational technology company who have publicly criticized Bezos for his lack of response to

climate change. According to its own sustainability report in 2018, Amazon is a massive polluter with a total annual carbon footprint of 44.40 million metric tons (mmt) of carbon dioxide equivalent.

This carbon volume—from fossil fuel-burning fleets of vehicles delivering packages around the world, immense amounts of electricity consumption at its Amazon Web Services data centers and many other sources, including its cardboard boxes and infamously wasteful bubble wrap packaging—is greater than that of Norway, Hong Kong, Ecuador and Sweden.

As reported on the *World Socialist Web Site*, the conflict between Amazon staff and company ownership came to a head on January 26 when more than 350 employees defied a corporate communications directive and spoke out publicly against its climate policy as well as other social and political issues.

A group called Amazon Employees for Climate Justice organized a worldwide walkout of 5,000 on September 20 of last year as part of the Global Climate Strike in which four million people participated internationally. In response to this event, Jeff Bezos issued a Climate Manifesto that aligned Amazon's emission reduction goals with a Washington, D.C. initiative called the “Climate Pledge” that would make the company carbon neutral by 2040.

Large numbers of Amazon employees rejected this insufficient schedule and demanded a more aggressive plan that would make the company carbon neutral by 2030. They also pointed out Bezos's hypocrisy on climate questions since he was contributing financially to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a think-tank that engages in climate denial on behalf of the fossil fuel industry.

As activist employees continued to speak out and expose Amazon's two-faced climate policies, the company mobilized its human resources department,

which threatened to fire workers for violating its policies.

In response to the Bezos Earth Fund, the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice published a statement on Twitter that states, “As history has taught us, true visionaries stand up against entrenched systems, often at great cost to themselves. We applaud Jeff Bezos’ philanthropy, but one hand cannot give what the other is taking away. The people of Earth need to know: When is Amazon going to stop helping oil & gas companies ravage Earth with still more oil and gas wells? When is Amazon going to stop funding climate-denying think tanks like the Competitive Enterprise Institute and climate-delaying policy? When will Amazon take responsibility for the lungs of children near its warehouses by moving from diesel to all-electric trucking?”

“Why did Amazon threaten to fire employees who were sounding the alarm about Amazon’s role in the climate crisis and our oil and gas business? What this shows is that employees speaking out works—we need more of that right now. Will Jeff Bezos show us true leadership or will he continue to be complicit in the acceleration of the climate crisis, while supposedly trying to help?”

There is no doubt that Bezos’s climate initiative is also aimed at trying to dull the growing bitterness and anger of the broader public over the exploding wealth of a tiny number of billionaires while the rest of the world’s people are struggling to make ends meet. According to an Oxfam report published on January 20, the world’s 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than a combined 4.6 billion people on Earth.

The corporate media has been mobilized to polish up the otherwise tarnished public perception of Bezos. *Forbes*, the enthusiastic publisher of an annual list of the world’s billionaires, has chimed in with unsolicited advice on how Bezos should spend his \$10 billion, adding, “Jeff Bezos has a tremendous opportunity to become a true climate leader.”

On the other hand, the public commentary on Twitter is dominated by bluntly honest statements. In one tweet, a poster said, “Jeff Bezos didn’t ‘donate’ \$10B to ‘fight climate change’ he’s setting up a \$10B venture called the ‘Bezos Earth Fund.’ In other words, he’s founding a bank and using it to invest in ‘the green sector,’ thereby profiting from & influencing how transition happens.”

Another wrote, “If he honestly cared enough about an issue to sacrifice a significant amount of his wealth to it and significantly impact his life for the cause he would never have become a billionaire. ... They're horrifically

flawed shells of people with no compassion for any cause.”

Under capitalism, the financial resources being applied to the “climate change industry,” such as the Bezos Earth Fund, are, above all, concerned with returns on investment. Groups of investors are competing with each other in research and development to find ways to earn a profit from green energy alternatives and methods for dealing with rising sea levels, record-breaking heat waves and uncontrollable wild fires.

The unfolding environmental catastrophe, along with the existential threats of nuclear war and deadly viral pandemics, are rooted in the capitalist system. Alongside these, the growth of extreme wealth inequality and the existence of super-billionaires such as Jeff Bezos are incompatible with the needs of billions of people on the planet.

These crises cannot be solved by wealthy individuals and their drop-in-the-bucket philanthropy. Solving the climate change crisis requires the dramatic and revolutionary reorganization of the productive forces of our global society carried out by the international working class on the basis of socialist economic planning.

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