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**Americans are Hurting,
But What About the Rest of the World?
Solidarity America
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While millions of Americans are waiting for their first unemployment check or the knock on the door by a sheriff's deputy bearing an eviction notice, there are people in other parts of the world for whom the economic collapse has them wondering how long they and their children can survive.

This deep recession, tending toward depression, is hurting Americans, but for hundreds of millions who have come to depend on "free trade" with the so-called developed world, it's a matter of life or death.

Factories are closing in China. People from the countryside who have been forced to the cities or the edges of cities to find work have found wage-paying jobs in the factories that seemingly produce everything that is sold in American retail stores. They make television sets, radios, cell phones, all manner of electronics equipment. They make screws and nails and all kinds of hardware. They make pots and pans and kitchenware, appliances, and, in the past few years, they have begun to grow more and more of the food we eat and the formula we feed to our infants.

America's trade imbalance with China is enormous, something that wouldn't have been imagined even 20 years ago. We owe them...plenty.

But when our economy started to go downhill on skids, they began hurting, as well. Untold numbers of those factories have been closing, because the orders from the U.S. just aren't coming in and the prospects of their picking up are not good.

India, a significant trading partner with the U.S., also has its problems, as it shifts from a largely agricultural society, to one that could become dependent on the kind of "industry" that is preeminent in the U.S. - use and storage of information.

The smaller Asian countries that have come to depend on "free trade" with developed nations also are feeling the pinch. Factors that have forced developing countries into difficulty include: debt, privatization of publicly-owned resources or government functions, and mass urbanization, which involves moving people off the land to urban areas.

The latter was the policy urged on developing nations, which were convinced to clear the land to grow cash crops for export to pay back loans to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This was done over many years by those two institutions and other "aid and assistance" agencies of the small elite of powerful nations, such as the U.S., Europe, and Japan. Little thought has been given to the disruption of peasant and indigenous cultures in a global economy. The thought of economic collapse never crossed their minds, but the potential negative effects are enormous.

There is small likelihood that peasants who have worked in the global factories of the provincial cities of China have any agricultural societies to return to. It will be the same for the workers in other Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia. They'll have to stay where they are.

At least, when they were back there in the mountains and valleys, they had the prospect of something to eat. They could grow it themselves. As urban dwellers or slum dwellers today, the potential for that is small. In China, the rich exist - by their own standard and even by the world standard - but they are a small percentage. They are capitalists within a Communist political shell and in many ways, it is capitalism the way America's Robber Barons of a century ago would have liked it.

Within the past year, the average hourly wage in China was estimated at about 57 cents, so, considering the affluence among some Chinese, the lowest wage has to be pretty low to bring that average to 57 cents.

China's arable land is limited, however, and, with water shortages coming and the growing of more and more food for export, there will be many millions of hungry people. But no provision was made to meet such emergencies by the people who run the global economy. The Chinese rural people would work for a penny or two on the dollar, compared with American workers and that's the only thing that mattered when the world was opened up for "free trade." Nobody prepared for economic collapse.

Now that the world is in an economic slide, the world's affluent have to ask themselves whether they have a responsibility to the world's poorest, those who have been used to make the cheap-goods-high-profit world economy. If the experience of American workers is any indication, the world's poor will wait a long time before transnational corporations make any effort to see that their wealth-producers have such basic human rights as food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, and clean water.

There is no global unemployment insurance program, and the aid programs of U.S.

foreign policy are not designed to help development, as much as to help the global corporations.

In the *Christian Science Monitor* this week was a picture of bags of pinto beans being unloaded in Congo, an African nation that is suffering in so many ways. On each bag was imprinted a large American flag and "U.S. AID."

It makes people feel good to provide that kind of assistance, but the policies of the U.S. government have been this: We'll give you money for food aid, but you have to buy the food from the U.S. and you have to have it shipped in American vessels. This kind of aid helps American agribusiness corporations and the shipping industry, but it does nothing for economic development in the recipient country.

Historically, shipments of food aid to countries around the world have been notorious for never making it out of the port city; rampant corruption in the distribution; routine theft and illegal sale of the food, and the near impossibility of getting the food to those who need it most because the road and highway systems are poor or non-existent.

Better to send aid to support growth of indigenous and peasant agricultural systems and the development of water systems. In such aid programs, the people would become self-sufficient and self-reliant. But there is little profit in this for the global trading system and, therefore, it is not of great interest to transnational corporations.

For our low-wage trading partners, there doesn't seem to be much in it, except low wages for people who traditionally have not worked for wages. The mantra of media cheerleaders of global "free trade" has been that it's enough that there are jobs that pay anything - even 10 cents an hour - because, before that, there were no wages.

Global corporations should have learned much over the years from their dealings with developing countries, but the way that food aid is being handled in Africa to this day shows that they have learned little. Most African countries were probably on the short list of countries whose people would work for a pittance to produce for the world market, but business interests have experienced disruption on their way to full economic dominance - worldwide recession.

Low-wage workers of the global economy are now in need and it's likely that no thought will be given to them, even though they have made the gargantuan profits possible. In the ideology of a global capitalist system, there is no responsibility to those workers who created the institutional wealth. Corporations don't care. The character of their structure does not allow them to care. People, though, can - and must - care and make a difference by taking action.

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Columnist, John Funiello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and


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