

Hunger Pangs in the Belly of the Beast

by Polly Mann

The financial publication *Forbes* reports this astounding fact: “The three wealthiest people in the United States—Bill Gates (Microsoft founder), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), and Warren Buffett (the investment company, Berkshire Hathaway)—now own *more wealth than the entire bottom half of the American population combined*. And in the entire world, eight of the top ten richest people are U.S. citizens. But blaming individuals ignores how bad the system is. These wealthy individuals are the beneficiaries of a system that enables their massive accumulation of wealth.

While wealth accumulates at the top within the U.S., what’s happening at the bottom? The majority of people are not experiencing famine as they tragically are in Yemen and do not go to bed hungry. But for a distressing 16.5 percent of U.S. households with children “access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources,” according to the most recent statistics reported by the United States Department of Agriculture (“Household Food Security in the United States in 2016.” Summary released 2017. ers.usda.gov). In addition, eight percent of households with children were “unable to provide adequate nutritious food for their children at some time throughout the year.”

Yet, the numbers of Americans uncertain where their next meal is coming from would be much higher without the success of supplemental programs. The USDA’s research says that “about 59 percent of food-insecure households surveyed were able to participate in one or more of the three largest federal nutrition assistance programs (SNAP; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and National School Lunch Program).” Sadly, as of this writing, Congress is working to finalize a tax bill described by the advocacy group, Food Research & Action Center, which will “overwhelmingly benefit the wealthiest individuals and corporations, and will ultimately be paid for by cuts to critical programs, like SNAP (the nation’s first line of defense against hunger).” Enacting the pending legislation, the advocates say, “will push millions of already struggling people deeper into poverty, and without question, will make hunger far, far worse in this country...”