

Number of US long-term jobless who lost benefits hits 2 million

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Since federal extended unemployment benefits expired at the end of December, the number of long-term unemployed in the US who have lost cash benefits has reached nearly 2 million.

Some 1.3 million people lost their unemployment benefits on December 28, and the ranks of those affected by the cutoff have been growing by 73,000 every week.

Democrats have largely dropped all mention of restoring the extended benefit program, which provides additional weeks of jobless pay beyond the 27-week cutoff for most states. In announcing his fiscal year 2015 budget proposal Tuesday, President Barack Obama made no mention of the cutoff of benefits. Obama's budget plan is itself right-wing, including provisions to slash Medicare spending and block undocumented immigrants from receiving health care under the federal program.

Speaking Wednesday in Connecticut to promote his so-called opportunity agenda and his call for a very modest increase in the minimum wage, Obama again did not even mention restoring benefits for the long-term unemployed.

The cutoff of extended jobless benefits comes after two successive cuts to food stamp benefits. On November 1, food stamps were slashed by \$11 billion, leading to benefit reductions for 46 million people. In January, congress voted to slash an additional \$8.7 billion from food stamps. Thus, millions of long-term unemployed workers are not only being cut off from cash assistance, they are also being hit with reductions in food assistance.

The issue of extended jobless benefits has likewise been dropped by the media, with next to no coverage of the impact of the ending of the program. Never before have extended unemployment benefits been terminated

while unemployment remained at such elevated levels as those that prevail today.

This is a measure of how far to the right the entire political establishment, the Democrats no less than the Republicans, has moved in recent years, and the reactionary character of the Obama administration.

Officially, there are ten million unemployed people in the US, up from 6.8 million in 2007. Fully 3.6 million people have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more, according to the official jobless rolls. This figure is three times larger than it was in 2006, when there were 1.1 million long-term unemployed.

Nearly 36 percent of the unemployed have been out of work for more than 27 weeks, three times higher than the average between 1948 and 2008. The mean duration of unemployment currently stands at 35.4 weeks, up from 16.9 weeks in 2006.

The cutoff of jobless benefits combined with cuts in food assistance has had a devastating impact on working people. Food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the country have reported a significant increase in need, with some being forced to start emergency fund drives or cut back the amount of food they give out.

Even before the most recent cutbacks in jobless aid and food stamps, demand for food assistance had been surging. According to the US Conference of Mayors, requests for emergency food aid in 25 major cities surged by 7 percent between mid-2012 and mid-2013.

Social conditions will worsen even more as a result of the recent slowdown in the US economy. Job growth in December and January was the worst for any two-month period since 2010 and well below the already tepid monthly average of 160,000 net new jobs from January through November of last year.

The US economy created 113,000 jobs in January,

according to the Labor Department's latest jobs report, far fewer than the 189,000 economists had predicted. December's jobs report was even worse, showing the US added only 75,000 jobs.

Late last month, the Bureau of Economic Analysis downgraded its estimate for real US economic growth in the fourth quarter of 2013 to 2.4 percent, down from its first estimate of 3.2 percent released at the end of January.

It was the White House and congressional Democrats who ensured the cutoff of jobless benefits by not including an extension of the program in the budget deal they reached with the Republicans at the end of last year.



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