As US shutdown heads toward its fourth week

Trump delivers fascistic White House rant to demand border wall

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9 January 2019

The putrefaction of American democracy and the turn by the US ruling elite toward dictatorship were on full display Tuesday night as President Donald Trump delivered a fascistic anti-immigrant rant, demanding funding for his US-Mexico border wall as the precondition for ending the partial government shutdown now in its 19th day.

The nine-minute prime time address, broadcast live by all of the broadcast and cable news networks, was a rehash of the administration's lies about a nonexistent "national security crisis" on the southwestern border. It featured Trump's standard depiction of immigrant workers and their families seeking refuge from poverty and repression—the result of a century of US imperialist intervention and exploitation throughout Latin America—as murderers, rapists and drug pushers.

In a transparent appeal to fascistic elements in his base, Trump conjured up an image of hordes of savages pouring across the border determined to spill the blood of innocent Americans. After citing several examples of Americans allegedly killed or raped by criminal "aliens," he asked, "How much more American blood must we shed before Congress does its job?"

In the run-up to the speech, claims made by Trump officials, including Vice President Mike Pence and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, that thousands of terrorists have been apprehended attempting to illegally enter the US from Mexico were exposed as pure fabrications. Widely cited was the State Department's summary of global terrorism threats published in September, which concluded that there was "no credible evidence indicating that international terrorist groups…sent operatives via Mexico into the United States."

"Our southern border," Trump declared, "is a pipeline for vast quantities of illegal drugs, including meth, heroin, cocaine and fentanyl. Every week 300 of our citizens are killed by heroin alone, 90 percent of which floods across from our southern border."

In fact, the vast bulk of illegal drugs enter the US in vehicles crossing into the country at legal ports of entry, traffic a border wall would do nothing to deter.

Trump did not in this speech go through with his threat to declare a national state of emergency and order the military to use Pentagon funds to build the border wall, in defiance of Congress and the US Constitution. But such an assertion of presidential dictatorship continues to loom over the mounting crisis triggered by Trump's refusal to sign a bill funding nine of the federal government's 15 cabinet-level departments and dozens of agencies unless it includes over $5 billion earmarked for his wall.

The shutdown itself marks a significant step in the direction of authoritarian rule, directed squarely against the working class. Some 800,000 federal workers—including, besides tens of thousands of federal police and uniformed border thugs, hundreds of thousands of low-paid airport screeners, national park employees, office workers and others, plus many thousands more contract employees—are being furloughed or forced to work without pay.

Friday will mark the first missed paycheck for thousands of families that struggle to survive from one paycheck to the next, in a country where 78 percent of full-time workers live paycheck to paycheck, 62 percent of the people have no emergency savings and household debt reached a record $13.2 trillion by the first quarter of 2018.

If, as Trump has threatened, the shutdown lasts until February or beyond, some 40 million food stamp recipients will begin to lose their benefits. The federal WIC nutrition program for pregnant women, infants and

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children, which serves seven million low-income people, has already been cut off, with states up to now stepping in to cover the funding gap.

The National Governors Association sent a letter to the White House and Congress on Monday urging an end to the shutdown and warning that programs they operate jointly with the federal government are in danger, including the $16.5 billion welfare program that funds cash assistance, job training and other services for low-income families. The association calculated that the shutdown has already halted $85.8 billion in federal money to the states for programs that cover transportation, housing, the judicial system, public lands and agriculture.

Trump barely mentioned the massive federal employee lockout and mounting social crisis in his speech, underscoring the contempt and indifference toward American workers behind Trump's pseudo-populist demagogy.

The official Democratic response was given by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. Their perfunctory remarks were punctuated by protestations of support for “border security” and appeals for bipartisan compromise, while lacking any concrete demands for a halt to the administration’s antidemocratic measures against immigrants. There was no call to free the incarcerated families and children, halt the Gestapo-type work place raids, tear down the tent city internment camps and the growing network of prisons for immigrants, or end the systematic violation of the right to asylum.

Pelosi declared, “We all agree we need to secure our borders,” including by hiring “the personnel we need,” i.e., more ICE agents and Border Patrol cops. Schumer said, “Make no mistake: Democrats and the president both want stronger border security.” They differed only in “the most effective way to do it.”

The one true statement Trump made in his speech was a reminder that Schumer and Pelosi had supported and voted for a border wall in the past, including offering just last year to back $25 billion for Trump's wall in return for a broader—and punitive—immigration package.

Most remarkable was the absence in their remarks of any warning about the deeply antidemocratic implications of the measures already taken by the Trump administration or the fundamental and far-reaching implications of the White House's threat to bypass Congress and order the military to build the wall under a state of emergency.

This underscores the fact that there is no democratic side in the political conflict within the ruling elite that has given rise to the government shutdown. The Democrats are allied with the predominant sections of the military and intelligence apparatus, which are using the Mueller anti-Russia probe and other investigations to either force Trump to adopt a more aggressive policy in the Middle East and against Russia or remove him from office altogether. They work to strengthen the police agencies of the state and operate with the methods of palace coup, while spearheading the drive to criminalize political opposition and censor the internet.

Trump speaks for sections of the financial oligarchy and the state that seek to impose authoritarian forms of rule by creating the basis for a fascistic movement outside of the normal two-party channels of American capitalist politics, while focusing their trade war policies and military preparations on China.

Both factions are agreed on austerity and the ever-greater enrichment of the corporate oligarchy, and terrified of the growth of working-class opposition—the Democrats, if anything, more so than the Republicans. So too are the trade unions, which in their refusal to lead any struggle against the shutdown are once again demonstrating their role as industrial police for the ruling class.

The working class must intervene into the crisis independently of both parties and all factions of the ruling class. It must build new organizations of struggle—rank-and-file factory, workplace and neighborhood committees, independent of the unions—to link up and coordinate the struggles of federal workers, teachers, auto workers and all sections of working people and youth in the US and internationally, as part of an offensive against the capitalist system.

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