

Anger grows across the US as closed-door talks continue on expired unemployment relief

Jacob Crosse
4 August 2020

Frustration, anxiety and anger are rising among the roughly 30 million workers who stopped receiving their weekly \$600 federal unemployment supplement last week after Congress failed to reach an agreement on a new coronavirus stimulus bill and adjourned for the weekend.

Closed-door talks Monday between Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, on the one side, and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, on the other, reportedly left the two sides far apart on a possible extension of the enhanced jobless benefit.

Both sides are agreed on slashing the already inadequate \$600 weekly benefit on the grounds that its recipients, part of the tens of millions laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the incompetent, Wall Street-dictated response of Trump and both big business parties, are being “overpaid.” They are haggling over the details of how much to cut and how fast to cut it.

The social interests behind the cut-off of jobless aid were demonstrated by the response of Wall Street. The Dow shot up 236 points on Monday. The Nasdaq jumped 157 points, prompting Trump to tweet, “RECORD HIGH NASDAQ.”

The refusal of Congress to extend the benefit sets the stage for a social catastrophe. Termination of the federal supplement cuts the weekly income of the unemployed by 60 to 90 percent. Tens of millions of households, already in arrears, face homelessness following the expiration of moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures.

According to a survey by the US Census Bureau, one in seven tenants in California did not pay rent on time

last month and nearly 1 in 6 do not expect to pay on time in August. The same survey found that overall in the US, 23,759,822 renters reported “no confidence” or “slight confidence” that they would be able to make rent in August.

The research firm Stout concluded that nearly 1 million renters across the Ohio valley, which includes Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia, are unable to pay rent this month and face eviction. At the end of July, Stout estimated that some 475,000, or 43 percent, of Michigan renters were at risk of losing their home.

Hunger, already on the rise as seen in the proliferation of mile-long lineups of cars at food distribution centers, is poised to explode and threaten starvation.

Official unemployment remains in the double-digits at 11.1 percent. For the week ending July 25, another 1.4 million workers filed initial unemployment claims, meaning that over 52 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits since mid-March.

An AP/NORC poll published last week revealed that 27 percent of households had someone laid off due to the pandemic, 33 percent had someone with reduced hours of work, 24 percent had someone forced to take unpaid time off, and 29 percent had someone working at reduced wages.

Congress’ failure to extend the federal unemployment benefit and a partial ban on evictions is not the result of partisan “gridlock.” It is deliberate policy. The aim is to blackmail workers back into virus-infected factories and workplaces so they can resume pumping out profits for the banks and corporations.

Hundreds of thousands of workers laid off during the pandemic have never received a cent of unemployment

pay due to the failure of state employment agencies to process their claims. In Colorado, the Department of Labor and Employment says of the 664,532 unemployment claims filed since mid-March, 223,298 claims are still pending.

In New Jersey, 50,000 are still waiting to be paid, while the Department of Employment, Education and Training in Nevada reports a “delay” that has caused over 20,000 claims to remain “unpaid.” Meanwhile, the agency has sent “overpayment” letters to thousands of workers who have yet to receive anything!

WSWS reporters spoke with workers in Illinois and Pennsylvania regarding the expiration of their benefits.

“I feel like I’m being deprived of my money that I earned for working,” Dana, an unemployed store manager, said. “I worked for over 20 years straight. When you get put on unemployment you don’t see all your money, like you would if working. The \$600 helped me tremendously. It was like getting a paycheck and being able to see all your money without them deducting your pay. I was able to play catch up on my bills and pay for medical expenses.”

Laura, an unemployed worker in Illinois, remarked that “the \$600 was a huge blessing and added benefit to my house. It allowed me to save and pay my bills.”

“I was laid off,” she continued. “I did not choose this situation. Being on unemployment is not ideal. I want to work, but no jobs are out there right now. I would like to get medical care and other benefits that are provided when you work.

“So I really don’t like it when the secretary of the Treasury makes it look like unemployed people have no incentive to look for work. Workers are used to hearing the lie that there is no money to support the programs we rely on, so, yes, I agree it is time we do something about it.”

“I don’t know what I am going to do,” Helen, an unemployed Pittsburgh worker, told the WSWS. “I worked as a health aide. My daughter is 9. I’ve been out of work since March when the schools closed.

“I couldn’t go to work because I don’t have anyone to take care of her. They are starting school, but I’m really scared what will happen to her. Things are getting worse in Pittsburgh. They ended the social distancing too soon and opened up the bars and restaurants. Now everyone is getting sick again. Even if the schools stay open, they are not having the after-

school programs and I don’t have anyone to watch my daughter.

“The \$600 allows me to pay my bills and buy food and things. I don’t know how we will get by. I have to pay for electric, gas and rent. I have car insurance, cable, phone and internet.

“They knew the unemployment was coming to an end. These politicians can meet and vote to give the rich all kinds of money, but when it comes to the poor they can’t find the time. All they care about is the rich. They don’t care about the working people.”



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