

# Ranks of long-term jobless soar as US unemployment aid dries up

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The number of long-term jobless workers in the United States continues to rise with millions of workers being forced to fend for themselves as the US Congress refuses to provide any aid to protect them against hunger, poverty and homelessness.

Last week's job report from the US Department of Labor showed that a staggering 695,000 workers dropped out of the workforce.

The number of long-term unemployed out of work for 27 weeks or more increased by 781,000 to 2.4 million. These workers have exhausted their 26-week limit on state unemployment benefits, and another five million laid-off workers will reach this limit over the next two months.

At the end of July, Congress allowed the \$600-a-week federal supplement to state benefits to expire, reducing weekly income in many cases by two-thirds or more over the last two months.

While Trump promised a \$300-a-week Lost Wages Assistance benefit for six weeks, the funds allocated for this totally inadequate program have quickly dried up, with at least nine states announcing they have ended paying the additional benefit.

Congress has shown no interest in restoring any jobless benefits and the issue has hardly rated a mention in the corporate media, let alone by Democratic candidate Joe Biden. The issue of extending jobless benefits was not raised a single time during the debate last week.

Under these conditions, hunger is rising. In August, the Feeding America network food banks distributed an estimated 593 million meals, an increase of 64 percent from a typical pre-pandemic month. Meals on Wheels America, another charity, reported that their food programs were serving an average of 77 percent more meals and 47 percent more high-risk seniors in August

than they were on March 1.

An analysis released last week by Feeding America projects a 6 billion to 8 billion meal shortfall over the next 12 months. The total need for charitable food over the next year, Feeding America estimates, will reach 17 billion pounds, more than three times last year's distribution.

A recent survey taken by the US Census Bureau in August found that 10.5 percent or 22.3 million adults say they cannot afford to adequately feed their families, up from 18 million in March.

This situation is being worsened by a new round of mass layoffs, including from airlines, entertainment companies and aircraft manufacturers, which received billions in CARES Act money and tax cuts. Over the last few days alone, corporations have announced almost 100,000 new layoffs.

Last Thursday, United, American and other major US airlines began laying off 32,000 flight attendants, pilots and other airline workers after the expiration of the temporary prohibition on permanent job cuts which was contained in the CARES Act's \$24 billion bailout of the airlines. On Monday, Southwest Airlines CEO Gary Kelly said all employees would have to take a 10 percent pay cut by Jan. 1, 2021, to avoid permanent job cuts.

This week Cineworld, the world's second-biggest cinema chain, is closing its US and United Kingdom theaters, laying off 45,000 workers, including nearly 40,000 at 536 Regal theaters in the US. This follows the announcement by Disney last week that it is laying off 28,000 of its 100,000 employees at its US parks and resorts.

Department store chain JCPenney will close 149 stores and cut 15,000 jobs ahead of the holiday shopping season as part of its plan to emerge from

bankruptcy.

Another 280,000 workers lost jobs last month in local and state education, as new austerity measures were imposed even as teachers and students were forced back into unsafe schools.

The American ruling class is seeking to use mass unemployment and the threat of poverty as bludgeons in its drive to herd workers back into unsafe factories and workplaces in order to further enrich the financial oligarchy. This is the policy not only of Trump and the Republicans but the Democrats on the federal, state and local levels. That is why the cutoff of jobless benefits has received bipartisan support.

But workers are fighting back in their own defense. This week, nurses and other health care workers are set to strike in Minneapolis and northern California. Protests by teachers, parents and students against the unsafe return to schools, which has already led to the deaths of 30 educators and the infection of thousands of students, are spreading across New York, Wisconsin and other states.

In opposition to the treachery of the unions, which have collaborated in the deadly back-to-school and back-to-work campaign, educators, autoworkers and other workers have set up rank-and-file safety committees in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Texas, Florida and other states.

In a report yesterday, World Bank Group President David Malpass warned of an “inequality pandemic,” a term first coined by the *World Socialist Web Site*, and warned the ruling elites of the potentially revolutionary consequences of international working-class resistance. “In an interconnected world, where people are more informed than ever before,” Malpass warned, “this pandemic of inequality—with rising poverty and declining median incomes—will increasingly be a threat to the maintenance of social order and political stability.”

The ruling class’s fear of mounting popular resistance to the Trump administration’s homicidal “herd immunity” policy is what lies behind the increasing moves towards authoritarian measures, including Trump’s threats of a presidential coup if he loses the elections. A report in the *Wall Street Journal* Monday noted that New York City Police Department was training its 35,000 cops “to prepare for the possibility of widespread unrest after the US

presidential election and the vote on the nomination of a new Supreme Court justice.”

As for Biden and the Democrats, there is nothing they fear more than a movement from below against Trump because of the danger this would pose to the corporate and financial oligarchy, which the Democrats defend just as ruthlessly as the Republicans.

But that is exactly what needs to be done. The growing opposition of workers and young people over the pandemic, social inequality, police killings, the danger of fascism and war must be united. In every workplace and community, new organizations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, must be formed, independent of the corrupt unions and both capitalist parties, to prepare a political general strike.

The American ruling class, which has produced only mass death and social misery, has no legitimate claim to hold onto political power. It is up to the working class to take the reins of power into its own hands, expropriate the private fortunes of the billionaires and carry out a socialist restructuring of economic and social life, to meet the needs of society, not the wealthy few.



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