

Trump breaks off talks on pandemic stimulus bill

Barry Grey**6 October 2020**

One day after his return to the White House from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where he received millions of dollars' worth of medical care for his COVID-19 infection at taxpayer expense, President Donald Trump announced on Twitter that he was breaking off talks on a new stimulus bill until after the November election.

In a series of tweets, he wrote: "Nancy Pelosi is asking for \$2.4 Trillion Dollars to bail out poorly run, high crime, Democrat States, money that is in no way related to COVID-19. We made a very generous offer of \$1.6 Trillion Dollars and, as usual, she is not negotiating in good faith.

"I am rejecting their request, and looking to the future of our Country. I have instructed my representatives to stop negotiating until after the election when, immediately after I win, we will pass a major Stimulus Bill that focuses on hardworking Americans and Small Business."

Trump went on say that he had asked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to "focus full time" on confirming his Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett, the far-right judge whose pre-election confirmation will virtually ensure that an eventual ruling on the election outcome will be favorable to Trump. Senate Republicans plan to hold a confirmation hearing for Barrett next Monday.

Trump's announcement is a savage attack on the working class under conditions of a worsening pandemic, a rising tide of permanent layoffs—on top what were already near-Depression levels of unemployment—soaring hunger and tens of millions of looming evictions and home foreclosures.

The move is consistent with Trump's escalation of plans to carry out an election coup d'état, refusing to recognize the results of the election if, as seems increasingly likely, they go against him, mobilizing his fascistic supporters inside and outside the police and military, and turning to a stacked Supreme Court to validate a stolen election and a de facto presidential dictatorship.

He is not basing his strategy on election polls, but rather on the drive by the most right-wing sections of the corporate-financial oligarchy to authoritarian rule.

In this civil war conspiracy, he is relying above all on his

supine and complicit political opposition, the Democratic Party. The Democrats, the presidential campaign of Joe Biden and the media aligned with them seized on Trump's COVID-19 illness to wish him a speedy recovery and rapid return to his "duties," which center on prosecuting his homicidal "herd immunity" policy in the pandemic, stoking military confrontations around the world, and plotting a coup to overturn the Constitution and violently crush mounting social opposition at home.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who has been holding sporadic and desultory talks with Trump's treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin on a new stimulus bill, issued a lame response on Twitter to Trump's announcement, writing: "President Trump has shown his true colors: walking away from coronavirus relief negotiations and refusing to give real help to poor children, the unemployed, and America's hard working families."

In fact, the Democrats colluded with Trump and the Republicans to allow the expiration of the \$600-a-week federal unemployment supplement on July 31, reducing the income of millions of workers by two-thirds or more. This followed their near-unanimous support for the CARES Act passed in March, which has provided some \$6 trillion in handouts and virtually free credit to the Wall Street banks and major corporations. Unlimited cash infusions by the Fed have fueled a massive rise on the stock market, which has boosted the wealth of America's billionaires by \$845 billion during the pandemic.

In August, Trump enacted a temporary, six-week \$300 boost in jobless pay by executive order, but that is rapidly running out. Meanwhile, last week's Labor Department employment report showed that nearly 700,000 workers dropped out of the workforce in September.

Non-farm payrolls rose by just 661,000 jobs, less than half of the number in August and the fourth monthly decline since June. The number of workers considered permanently unemployed because there are no jobs for them to return to rose to 3.8 million. This is an increase of 2.5 million since February.

The ranks 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.

Just over the past several days, US corporations have announced more than 100,000 new layoffs. These include at least 40,000 airline jobs, 45,000 cinema jobs, 28,000 Disney resort and theme park jobs, along with 280,000 education jobs.

What is unfolding in the United States—and around the world—is a social catastrophe that promises to exceed even the devastation of the years of the Great Depression. In the US, 10 million people have already lost their health insurance as a result of being laid off.

Food banks have seen the volume of food distribution soar by nearly 80 percent. A survey taken by the US Census Bureau in August found that 10.5 percent of adults, or 22.3 million people, said they could not afford to adequately feed their families, up from 18 million in March.

Bloomberg recently published a report on hunger in the United States that found that 50 million Americans, about one-sixth of the entire population, will struggle to afford enough to eat this year. This is up by 45 percent year-on-year.

The *Washington Post* published an article on September 30 based on Labor Department data showing that since mid-March, the lowest 25 percent of income earners have seen their wages decrease by as much as 30 percent, while the top 25 percent have seen their earnings remain the same or slightly increase. Meanwhile, ultra-wealthy pandemic profiteers such as Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and Tesla CEO Elon Musk have seen their wealth increase by 65 and 50 percent respectively.

Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) imposed a moratorium on evictions until January 1, 2021. The CDC warned that as many as 30 to 40 million people could be at risk of eviction and warned that "A wave of evictions on that scale would be unprecedented in modern times."

However, the order does not reduce rent payments, or cancel fees, penalties or interest. During the moratorium, rent and fees will accrue as usual, leaving renters with a massive bill in the new year.

Diane Yentel, CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, told National Public Radio, "While an eviction moratorium is an essential step, it is a half-measure that extends a financial cliff for renters to fall off of when the moratorium expires and back rent is owed."

In addition, millions of homeowners are facing the prospect of foreclosure. According to mortgage analytics

firm Black Knight, 3.9 million households were not paying their mortgages as of late August.

These conditions are not the unavoidable result of a biological disaster. Rather, they are the result of a deliberate class policy being carried out by the ruling corporate-financial oligarchy, which controls both major political parties. Trump, along with the Republicans and Democrats in Congress, having been briefed on the virulent and deadly nature of the coronavirus in January, concealed the danger of the pandemic from the public for fear of spooking the financial markets.

After passing the CARES Act bailout, they moved rapidly to reopen the economy by forcing workers back into unsafe factories and workplaces, using mass layoffs and looming poverty as a bludgeon. This homicidal policy, which has fueled a new upsurge of infections and deaths, has been expanded with the drive to reopen the schools and colleges. For the ruling class, compelling workers to resume producing profits for the capitalist owners is dictated by the need to back up the vast expansion of government and corporate debt with real surplus value pumped out of the working class.

This is a bipartisan policy, spearheaded by Trump but implemented on the state and local levels by Democratic as well as Republican officials. The bitter conflicts between the two parties center on questions of imperialist foreign policy, with the Democrats demanding a more aggressive stance towards Russia and the Middle East. On the war on the working class, they are in basic agreement.

In last week's presidential debate, Biden did not even raise the issue of mass unemployment or the cutoff of federal aid for laid-off workers, and he has made clear his support for the back-to-work and back-to-school drives.



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