Hunger and evictions surge in the US

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The worst social catastrophe to befall the US working class since the Great Depression of the 1930s continues to leave millions of people hungry, jobless and facing eviction.

Video taken outside a food distribution site in Dallas, Texas this past weekend by CBS News gives some indication of the widespread hunger facing workers and their families. Saturday's giveaway hosted by the North Texas Food Bank was the largest ever put together by the organization.

Feeding America, the second-largest food charity in the US, estimates that upwards of 54 million people, including one in four children in the US are facing food insecurity.

The growing need for food among millions of workers and their families is coinciding with record levels of COVID-19 infections reported in states across the country. In Texas, over 1 million have contracted the coronavirus, with over 20,000 perishing, the second highest death toll in the country behind New York. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation forecasts roughly another 190,000 deaths by March 1, 2021 if current trends continue.

On top of food insecurity, between 11 and 13 million renter households across the country are at risk of eviction, according to research by Stout, an investment bank and global advisory firm.

The Eviction Lab at Princeton University reports that eviction filings increased in several major metro areas following the expiration of CARES Act provisions at the end of July and before the CDC eviction moratorium was implemented on September 4. However, even with the moratorium, Princeton researchers note that evictions have continued across the country, and Stout estimates that with its expiration at the end of the year, this could lead to up to 6.4 million eviction filings.

The Eviction Lab data shows that two weeks after the CDC moratorium was implemented, evictions still continued to be processed, with 508 in Fort Worth and 1,053 in Houston, Texas. Filings also increased on a month-to-month basis in several cities, including Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and in the Florida cities of Tampa, Jacksonville and Gainesville.

In North Carolina, almost 25,000 eviction cases were filed between July and September, according to data from the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts, with almost 15,000 completed. Overall, Stout estimates that between 300,000 and 410,000 North Carolina households are unable to pay rent, with 240,000 expected eviction filings by January 2021.

In an interview with CNN, attorney Michael Trujillo commented on the bind that renters will find themselves in come January 1, 2021. "The pandemic is not going away before the end of the year," he said, adding that without additional protections, "a huge wave of evictions" is on the horizon.

In a Hill-HarrisX poll taken between November 10 and November 13, 77 percent of US voters were in favor of passing a coronavirus relief package "as soon as possible." Yet despite massive popular support for more stimulus, no relief is coming.

After the House and Senate passed the $2.2 trillion CARES Act at the end of March, which provided billions to Wall Street, large corporations and the well-connected, ensuring their financial stability for a lifetime, workers were left with limited protections and only temporary unemployment relief. Congress has yet to pass another bill long after the $1,200 stimulus checks have been sent out and enhanced unemployment benefits have expired. Months of inaction have left millions of workers and their families without additional stimulus, eviction protection, health care, food or medicine, exacerbating mental health issues and stress.

Included in the CARES Act was an eviction moratorium that expired, along with the federal $600-a-week unemployment supplement, at the end of July. After Congress failed to come to terms on another bill at the end of July, the Centers for Disease Control, on September 4, implemented a federal eviction moratorium, which required tenants to sign a declaration and provide a copy

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to their landlord. This, along with additional federal unemployment assistance distributed under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) programs, are set to expire the final week of December, leaving millions of people who have yet to find jobs or come up with the monies needed to pay back rent facing eviction in less than 50 days.

As of October, some 13 million people were receiving benefits through the PUA or PEUC program, more than from state unemployment insurance, which has also expired for millions of workers.

While the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates that over 11.1 million people are unemployed, thousands of workers, primarily low-wage workers, continue to be laid off. Last week, the BLS recorded over 700,000 first-time unemployment filings for the 34th week in a row, with first-time unemployment claims exceeding any week throughout the 2008-09 Great Recession.

A *Washington Post* analysis found that among higher education workers, low-wage and administrative staff have seen ongoing monthly job losses or have not been called back to campus, while higher paid instructors have been hired back. The *Post* found that while colleges hired 180,000 workers during the fall semester last year, only 20,000 jobs were added this year.

Mass unemployment has led workers to apply for state unemployment benefits, but hundreds of thousands have yet to receive anything nearly eight months into the pandemic. In Wisconsin, reporters working with Wisconsin Watch found that nationally only 56 percent of unemployment claims were paid from March through August, while in Wisconsin the level was only 42.5 percent. As of November 10, more than 94,000 people in the state were still waiting for either state or federal unemployment benefits.

For those who were fortunate enough to receive benefits, their expiration and the inability to find safe well-paying work have left them unable to afford basic necessities.

The out-of-control spread of the virus coupled with overcrowded hospitals prompted a flurry of public health declarations over the past 72 hours from Republican and Democratic governors, such as Iowa Republican Kim Reynolds and Michigan Democrat Gretchen Whitmer. These included curfews, mask mandates and calls to limit social gatherings to 10 people or less. However, not one politician in either party is advancing the necessary demand to resume lockdowns of all non-essential businesses, with guaranteed pay for jobless workers and small business owners.

As Democratic President-elect Joe Biden made clear in his speech yesterday after meeting with corporate executives, the number one concern of the ruling class is "to get the economy back on track," not to stop the spread of the virus, feed the hungry, provide relief or house the homeless. All policy is focused on ensuing the flow of profits to the corporations and Wall Street.

Not once in Biden's speech did he call for resuming the unemployment benefits in the CARES Act or extending eviction moratoriums.

This is because despite all its declarations, the Democratic Party is not a party of workers. It, as Biden's transition team attests, is a party of Wall Street, big banks, Amazon, and the military-industrial complex.

In the latest round of political theater on Tuesday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer wrote a letter to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell appealing, "for the sake of the country," to "come to the table and work with us to produce an agreement that meets America's needs in this critical time."

The letter noted that the negotiations should begin from the previous failed starting offer of $2.2 trillion, which McConnell and the Republicans have dismissed, a position from which they have not budged for the last six months. Despite the intransigence on the part of the Republicans, the fact is that the Democrats and Republicans in the Senate have found time to advance several of President Trump's federal judges past committee hearings, including Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett, allowing them to be approved.

Ultimately, both parties see the provision of even the most meager benefits as a "disincentive" for their real aim: getting workers back on the job in factories and other workplaces amid a raging pandemic.

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