

Congress to America's workers: "Let them eat cake"

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Congress spat in the face of the working class and their families Monday night when it passed a \$900 billion pandemic "relief" package that would deliver an insulting \$600 stimulus check, nothing close to relief for the tens of millions of Americans who are suffering through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The measure was attached to a \$1.4 trillion spending bill, meaning that the House and Senate voted on and passed a record 5,593-page-long measure that none of the senators, representatives nor their aides had any time to read through. Every Democratic senator, including Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, voted for it. The bill passed in the House with only two Democrats, Rashida Tlaib and Tulsi Gabbard, voting against. DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who postured on social media about not having enough time to read the bill, nonetheless gave the measure her stamp of approval.

The relief bill backed by the Democratic Party provides for a one-time direct stimulus payment of \$600 to adults who made less than \$75,000 in 2019 along with checks for each child, half of the \$1,200 contained in the CARES Act passed in March. A family of four which made less than \$110,000 will receive \$2,400.

What is \$600?

- Six days of living in Chicago for a single person with no children, renting a studio apartment
 - Half of an ambulance ride in Los Angeles
 - The cost of one month's food for the average two-person household
 - A month and a half of the average student loan payment
 - The extraction of a tooth without insurance
- Coming at a time when COVID-19 infections and

deaths are at their highest point ever and still rising, the bill is insultingly inadequate to meet the immense needs of millions of suffering people. While Congress spends money like water to prop up big business and the Federal Reserve funnels trillions into the stock market, nothing is being done to spare the working class. After months of supposedly tense negotiations over emergency assistance, the Democrats and Republicans have declared, "Let them eat cake!"

More than 70 million Americans have filed for unemployment since March, when the first lockdown measures and restrictions were put in place across the country. Millions have been left waiting weeks or months to be approved and many have been denied aid or asked to pay back "wrongful payments."

Nearly two thirds of Americans have been living paycheck to paycheck since the pandemic began, and one third have opened up a new credit card to cover expenses, according to a survey by Highland Solutions. Nearly 80 percent now say they would be unable to cover an emergency expense of \$500.

The stimulus check will not even come close to covering one month's rent for millions. The median monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the US is more than \$1,000 per month. In cities like New York and San Francisco the average monthly rent is well over \$3,000.

The national moratorium on evictions—which has not stopped tens of thousands of evictions from being filed and thousands tossed from their homes—has been extended by Congress by a month, meaning that millions have the cold comfort of being thrown to the curb in February rather than January.

While the bill provides \$25 billion in rental assistance, approximately 12 million renters will owe an average of \$5,850 for back rent and utilities on

January 1, according to Moody's Analytic, for a total of \$70 billion. There is no provision in the bill for the forgiveness of back rent. Nearly 6 million Americans expect to be evicted or foreclosed in the coming months.

While the \$600 stimulus will not cover the average month's rent, perhaps House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (net worth \$160 million) and Senate leader Mitch McConnell (net worth \$34 million) and the other elite members of Congress had the day-to-day expenses from their world in mind. For example, a meal for two plus wine at the exclusive French Laundry restaurant in Napa Valley, where California's Democratic governor Gavin Newsom was recently caught breaking coronavirus restrictions, costs approximately \$1,200.

While they could only throw pocket change at the working class, the bill approved by Congress Monday includes \$7.8 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ensuring that gestapo raids on the homes of immigrants and deportations will continue for another year. It also provides for the needs of American imperialism, giving \$300 million for "countering Chinese influence" and absurdly recognizing the Dalai Lama's reincarnation process. \$40 million and \$33 million respectively are to be shoveled into the efforts to overthrow the governments of Syria and Venezuela.

If the ruling class think that \$600 is enough to stave off social convulsion for any significant period of time, they are about to find out differently. Immense anger is building up as nothing has been done to control a pandemic which has now killed more than 320,000 Americans and is projected to kill hundreds of thousands more.

The mantra of the ruling elite has been that the cure cannot be worse than the disease. This means that factories and schools have been kept open even as they have operated as major vectors of coronavirus. President-elect Joe Biden has declared that there will be no national lockdown and schools will be reopened in the first weeks of his administration.

It is becoming clear to millions of workers that their lives and well-being are being deliberately sacrificed in the interests of Wall Street and that help will not be coming from the Democrats or Republicans. Immediate action needs to be taken now to save lives. Workers must form rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace to coordinate action to shut down

nonessential workplaces and schools while guaranteeing full compensation until the pandemic is under control. This can only be achieved through the expropriation of the oligarchs and profiteers who have capitalized on the pandemic, and the transformation of large banks and corporations into democratically controlled operations.

The working class confronts the entire capitalist system. The struggle against the pandemic must be guided by an international socialist program, whose aim is to transform society to meet human need and not private profit.



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