Biden’s program for mass hunger: Food stamps being cut back for 42 million

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Food stamp benefits are being reduced across the board Wednesday, with 42 million Americans, all of them poor and many of them children, seeing cuts ranging from $95 to $235 a month per household. The average per capita payment will fall to $6.10 a day, or about $2 a meal.

This monstrous attack on the most vulnerable in American society is being carried through on a bipartisan basis. An emergency increase of food stamp benefits enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic was ended, effective March 1, 2023, by the omnibus budget bill passed by Congress last December and signed into law by President Biden.

Further cuts for the poorest Americans are already in the pipeline, either as part of the budget legislation or because of Biden’s decision to end the Public Health Emergency (PHE) and declare the COVID-19 pandemic over, effective May 11, 2023. This declaration flies in the face of the grim reality that hundreds continue to die every day from COVID-19 in the US alone and thousands worldwide.

The cuts will include the restart of eligibility determination for food stamps, Medicaid and other social benefits, which was halted in March 2020 when the eruption of the pandemic compelled the Trump administration to declare a national emergency. Hundreds of thousands of families and individuals will be cut off month by month and millions by the end of the year.

The reduction in food stamps (officially SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) actually began on February 1, when 18 states, all of them Republican-controlled, began the cuts as soon as it was legally possible. The one month phase-in of the cuts ends March 1, when 32 states plus the District of Columbia, Guam and the US Virgin Islands, will put them in place.

The numbers affected on March 1, state by state, are staggering. The top 16 include: California, 2.93 million people; New York, 1.61 million; Texas, 1.34 million; Illinois, 1.06 million; Pennsylvania, 1.04 million; North Carolina, 813,000; Michigan, 705,000; Ohio, 673,000; Massachusetts, 629,000; Washington, 518,000; Virginia, 470,000; Oregon, 416,000; Alabama, 393,000; New Jersey, 388,000; Maryland, 360,000; and Wisconsin, 347,000.

The food stamp cuts are particularly perverse and reactionary because they take place under conditions of high inflation in food prices. According to the US Department of Agriculture, food prices rose by 11.4 percent in 2022 overall, faster last year than in 2021. Eggs led the way, up 32.2 percent, in part because of the avian flu epidemic. Fats and oils were up 18.5 percent, poultry was up 14.6 percent, other meat up 14.2 percent. Cereals and bakery products were up 13 percent.

Millions of low income people, most of them drawn from the “working poor,” must now pay these higher prices from a food stamp allotment that has been slashed significantly and will stay there. The Congressional Budget Office projects that overall food stamp outlays will fall this year because of the cutoff of emergency benefits and remain flat for the next decade.

The result, according to the Food Research and Action Center, a research and lobbying group in Washington, is that millions will go over a “hunger cliff.” The organization warned, “The steepest cliff will be for older adults at the minimum benefit level who will have their monthly SNAP benefits fall from $281 to $23.”

Mass hunger will grow, and there will be increasing demand on the pathetically inadequate resources of food banks and other charities. In Georgia, where the cuts have already taken effect, the Atlanta Community Food Bank reported a 34 percent increase in visits.

The Biden administration has declared that Russia is guilty of “crimes against humanity” in the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the American government is carrying out what can only be called a “crime against

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humanity" within the United States. But there have been no presidential speeches about the cuts to food stamps, and no "courageous" secret visits to Michigan, Mississippi or West Virginia for the president to show his solidarity and sympathy with those struggling to survive. That is because Biden himself is the author of this crime, along with those he likes to call his "Republican friends."

Biden's war against Russia and his war against the poor and the working class at home are directly connected. The US government has already spent $110 billion on the war against Russia in Ukraine, which was deliberately provoked by the expansion of NATO through Eastern Europe to Russia's borders. This is roughly the same as the $113 billion annual cost of the entire SNAP program, and more than triple the amount that will be "saved" through the cutbacks being imposed on March 1.

The total number of Americans affected by the food stamps cutoff, 42 million, is even larger than the population of Ukraine, 39 million. The US ruling elite cares nothing about either one. The people of Ukraine are being used as cannon fodder for a war against Russia that has been instigated by Washington as part of its drive to dominate the Eurasian land mass. The recipients of food stamps are being further impoverished in order to pay for that war and provide the even greater sums required for the worldwide operations of the American military machine, including an impending war with China.

There are no screaming newspaper headlines or emergency bulletins on cable news about the impending disaster for 42 million Americans, who would comprise the largest state in the country if taken as a unit. Not a single congressional leader, Democratic or Republican, has issued a statement of protest. That is, of course, because they all agreed to this policy with their votes last December.

Particular note should be taken of the silence from the so-called left wing of the Democratic Party. Senator Bernie Sanders has said nothing. On his Senate website, one can find him declaring that food stamp cuts by the Republican administration of Donald Trump were "unconscionable." But when the cuts come now under the Democratic administration of Joe Biden, the self-proclaimed "democratic socialist" loses his voice.

Likewise, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her "squad" of House members, who belong to or are supported by the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America, have said nothing against the food stamp cuts. Ocasio-Cortez too denounced the food stamp cuts by Trump, declaring that the program was vital to working people, and that her own family "may have starved" without it. But under Democrat Joe Biden, and with a six-figure congressional salary, the starving masses are no longer her concern.

To fight against the cuts, which are plunging tens of millions even further into poverty and destitution, the working class must advance its own independent alternative to capitalist politics. Working people must break with the existing political structure of two parties, both irrevocably committed to the defense of the profit system and the worldwide interests of American imperialism. They must find a new road.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the development of a political movement of the working class that is independent of the two-party system and opposed to capitalism and imperialist war. We advocate a socialist program, which puts the needs of working people first, not corporate profit and private wealth.

There are ample resources in American society to put an end to poverty, hunger, disease and premature death. But these resources are hoarded by a ruling elite that is a tiny fraction of the population. These trillions of dollars are the product of the labor of hundreds of millions of working people. They must be controlled by the working class, not monopolized by Wall Street or funneled into the Pentagon war machine.

Workers should demand the rescinding of all social benefit cuts, the establishment of a minimum income sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for the entire population and abolish hunger and poverty, and the initiation of a massive program of public works to rebuild crumbling neighborhoods, roads, hospitals and schools.

This effort must be paid for through the confiscation of the wealth of the pandemic profiteers and other billionaires and the transfer of all industries, utilities, transportation and finance to public ownership, to be run democratically in the interests of working people.

This means a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system, which requires the building of a new revolutionary party of the working class. The Socialist Equality Party is that organization. We urge working people and youth to contact us, study our program and perspective, and make the decision to join the SEP.

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