

The corporate-financial interests behind Trump's executive orders to deploy the National Guard in US cities

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In 1907, the great socialist author Jack London wrote a novel titled *The Iron Heel*, which depicted the creation of a ruthless dictatorship by a capitalist oligarchy determined to crush the working class. London wrote:

The Oligarchy wanted violence, and it set its agents?provocateurs to work. ... Eleven thousand men, women, and children were shot down on the streets of Sacramento or murdered in their houses. [Chapter 16]

Nearly 120 years later, the working class and youth throughout the United States are confronting the growing specter of an **Iron Boot**.

The Trump administration is relentlessly escalating its drive to establish a presidential dictatorship. To deny this after the past two weeks, during which Trump has taken actions that are without precedent in US history, is blindness, self-deception or outright collaboration. The president has turned Washington D.C. into a police-military garrison and is extending this template nationwide.

On Monday, Trump issued an executive order titled "Additional Measures to Address the Crime Emergency in the District of Columbia," building on his August 11 declaration of a fraudulent "crime emergency" and taking new steps toward dictatorship. It authorizes an online portal to recruit ex-police, ex-soldiers and vigilantes for deployment in Washington and "other cities where public safety and order has been lost." In plain language, Trump is creating a paramilitary force operating outside traditional structures, at his personal command, with license to use lethal force.

The order also instructs the Secretary of Defense to "immediately create and begin training, manning, hiring, and equipping a specialized unit within the District of Columbia National Guard" and to ensure that every state's National Guard is "resourced, trained, organized, and available" for rapid nationwide mobilization. In practice, this establishes a standing military-police force at the president's disposal, ready to be unleashed against protests, strikes and political opposition anywhere in the country.

The nominal reasons given for these actions—that the cities are overrun by crime, which follow the claims of an "invasion" by the

United States of immigrants—are obvious lies. Nor can these actions simply be attributed to Trump's egocentric narcissism or longstanding admiration of Hitler. Trump is acting on behalf of a financial oligarchy, which is breaking with constitutional forms of rule.

What political reasons would lead the administration and the ruling class to feel that it is necessary to deploy soldiers in American cities to counter "civil unrest"? The question must be answered, not on the basis of the personalities involved, but of the fundamental class issues at the root of the collapse of American democracy.

In purely financial terms, American capitalism is confronted with a situation that is economically untenable. The national debt stands at \$37 trillion and is projected to surge past \$40 trillion with the extension of Trump's tax cuts for corporations and the super-rich. The federal government is already running annual deficits of \$1.5–\$2 trillion.

Interest payments on this mountain of debt are projected to become the single largest federal expenditure within the next decade, outstripping even the gargantuan military budget. This inexorable growth of debt service reflects not only decades of tax cuts for the wealthy but also the immense resources diverted into bailouts and imperialist war.

Mandatory programs account for nearly two-thirds of the budget: Social Security about 20 percent, Medicare another 15 percent, and Medicaid and related programs another 14 percent. "Discretionary" spending—that is, all spending outside of these programs—accounts for less than a third, with military spending alone swallowing 13 percent and all other programs combined just 14 percent.

As far as the ruling class is concerned, military spending can and will not be reduced—indeed, it will rise as Washington escalates its global confrontations throughout the world. Nor will the financial aristocracy accept any incursion on its wealth, with Trump's "big, beautiful bill" handing trillions more to corporations and the super-rich. Eliminating all non-defense discretionary spending, which the Trump administration is actively implementing, will still not resolve the budget deficit.

What remains, therefore, is a massive assault on the central social programs—Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—that provide basic income, healthcare and dignity for hundreds of

millions of people. While Trump repeatedly vows never to touch Social Security, this claim is even less credible than his other lies. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, a Wall Street billionaire, boasted last month that provisions in Trump's budget bill would provide "a back door for privatizing Social Security."

The impact of such cuts on the broad mass of the population will be devastating. Social Security is the main source of income for tens of millions of retirees and disabled people; a 25–30 percent reduction would strip \$6,000–\$7,000 a year from the typical retiree and push millions into poverty. Medicare and Medicaid cuts would mean soaring out-of-pocket medical bills for seniors and disabled people, and the closure of nursing homes and home care programs relied on by millions. Medicaid and income support programs such as SNAP, SSI and child tax credits, which sustain working class families and children, are already being gutted.

Trump's program speaks for a ruling class determined to reverse the entire course of modern American history, tearing up every social advance won through struggle since the Civil War. It is not coincidental that Trump is attempting to revive the glorification of Confederate heroes.

Federal workers are being purged by the tens of thousands. Public education and public health face unprecedented cuts. Whatever remains of the New Deal and Great Society reforms are to be dismantled. The aim is nothing less than the liquidation of all the limited concessions wrested from the capitalist class in the 20th century.

The government is preparing in advance for the inevitable eruption of mass opposition to these attacks. The ruling class is convinced that the destruction of jobs, pensions, healthcare and basic living standards will provoke uprisings, particularly in the cities. For years, the state has been preoccupied with the danger of urban unrest, and Trump's executive orders are designed to ensure that such resistance is met with military force and suppression.

This basic class dynamic also explains the role of the Democratic Party. While there may be disagreements over Trump's methods, both big business parties accept that drastic changes in social policy must be imposed at the expense of the working class. The differences are tactical. On the central question—who will pay for the deepening crisis of American capitalism—there is no disagreement.

Press coverage treats Trump's executive orders as little more than his latest eccentricities. Democratic leaders focus their criticisms on procedure, as though the destruction of constitutional government were a matter of Trump's personality. Not one leading Democrat has stated openly that the president is establishing a dictatorship or explained the class forces driving his actions. In reality, the Democrats fear above all that Trump's brazen measures will provoke an uncontrollable movement from below.

This reality underscores the decisive role of the working class in the unfolding political crisis. Workers who imagine that Trump's violent attacks on immigrants or his fraudulent crusade against "crime" have nothing to do with them are gravely mistaken. The imposition of authoritarian rule will extend into every aspect of social life.

The working class—its jobs, living standards, social benefits and

democratic rights—is the principal target of the ruling class drive for austerity, imperialist war and dictatorship. Strikes will be outlawed, and any form of resistance to the dictates of the oligarchy will be criminalized.

The most urgent task confronting workers, youth and all progressive sections of society is to confront political reality and develop a strategy to defend democratic rights. As the WSWS wrote on August 20:

In the absence of opposition from within the existing political structure, the center of resistance to Trump must move to the working class. The basic political questions that must be answered are: What must be done by the working class, with the support of students and all progressive forces within society, to stop the establishment of a dictatorship in the United States? What are the new forms of organized mass action, including a general strike, required to defend the democratic rights of the working class? What changes in the economic and social structure of the country are necessary to break the power of the financial-corporate oligarchy?

In confronting the rebellion of the Slavocracy in 1861, Lincoln was driven to the conclusion that the democratic principles proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence could be preserved only through a revolution that destroyed the economic base of the Confederacy, slavery. Exactly 160 years after the conclusion of the Civil War, the threat of a fascistic military-police dictatorship poses the necessity of ending the economic base of oligarchic power, capitalism, and its replacement with workers' power and socialism.

The Socialist Equality Party urges all those who agree with this analysis to join the SEP and take up the fight against dictatorship and for socialism.



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