

# Long-term unemployment in US surges to 1.9 million as job openings dry up

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The number of long-term unemployed in the United States has reached levels not seen since the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to data released last week by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In August, more than 1.9 million had been out of work six months or longer, almost 26 percent of the total number of unemployed. This is the highest percentage since February 2022, near the ending of the pandemic lockdowns. That level of long-term unemployment has previously been seen only during periods of recession.

According to the *Washington Post*, the average time to find a job is now six months, a period longer than before the pandemic. In addition, there are now more job seekers than there are job openings.

The figures are the latest indication of the rising levels of economic distress that are fueling social tensions at the same time as the Trump administration is seeking to criminalize political opposition with troop deployments to US cities and the witch-hunt following the shooting of far right ideologue Charlie Kirk.

Of significant note is the high percentage of the long-term unemployed who are college graduates, nearly one third of the total, compared to one fifth 10 years ago. In the past, holding a college degree tended to make someone more employable. Currently, the overall jobless rate for recent college graduates is 6.5 percent, well above the official unemployment rate of 4.3 percent.

The difficulties that college graduates are encountering finding work are the product of a number of factors, including the rise in the number of graduates and a decline in the number of job postings that require applicants to possess a degree. Trump's slashing of federal jobs has disproportionately impacted the college educated. Automation, restructuring and the use of

artificial intelligence are additional factors fueling this trend.

"The data is signaling that there's some restructuring going on," said Andreas Mueller, an expert on long-term unemployment at the University of Zurich cited by the *New York Times*. "People are losing jobs and can't find jobs in high-skilled occupations."

Fox News reports that its recent survey found a mounting perception that Trump's economic policies are hurting workers. It reports "more voters say the Trump administration has made the economy worse (52 percent) rather than better (30 percent)."

The *Times* notes that long-term unemployment contributes to high levels of stress. In a survey of 200 long-term unemployed many expressed feelings of anxiety or depression. Some mentioned thoughts of suicide. Katie, an unemployed college graduate told the *Times* she had applied for more than 3,000 jobs. "The stress of rejection is unbearable," she said.

Six months is a significant marker for many job seekers, since that is often the maximum length of time laid off workers can receive jobless benefits. Not only do financial pressures increase, but also psychological pressures. In fact, many workers stop looking for work altogether and are no longer counted in the official statistics. Employers are often more reluctant to hire the long-term unemployed.

"I'm on gap year to meet the qualifications for the teacher's certification program, but I doubt that I'm able to pay for it," a young worker in northern California told the World Socialist Web Site. "Everything related to education is attacked, from financial aid to mass firings. My old middle school is threatened with being closed despite it being considered a 'good' school. I'm pressured to switch my career plans into healthcare, but even that's under assault. Everything is under attack

really, and we have to do something about it.”

Posting on Reddit, workers noted their struggles with the impact of long-term unemployment. “40 years in my industry, 18 months searching now, I’m wiped out completely. My days are filled with depression, selling everything I own for food & electric (and I’ve run out of things people will buy!!) and searching for work,” wrote one older job seeker.

Said another, “It’s been seven months filled with a lot of anxiety. Right now, I’m taking antidepressants. I had a fight with my boyfriend because of my anxiety, and we’re no longer together. In two months, I’ll be losing my apartment and running out of money.”

Another wrote, “Grad student, worked two years for the state department, got dogged and can’t find a job. I’m stuck doing uber and DoorDash. I can barely survive.”

The report on long-term unemployment comes on top of reports that weekly jobless claims are at the highest level since 2021 and that inflation is once again surging, due in large part to Trump’s tariff war, further reducing workers living standards. Axios reports, “Virtually all major grocery categories are now more expensive than they were a year ago, some substantially so.” Prices rises have hit everything from apples to beef. Coffee prices are up a whopping 20 percent.

The firing of BLS director Erika McEntarfer by President Trump in August has done nothing so far to staunch the tide of bad economic reports. Earlier this month, the BLS issued revised data showing the US added 911,000 fewer jobs over the previous 12 months than had been initially reported. Only 22,000 new jobs were added in August and the unemployment rate reached 4.3 percent, the highest level in four years.

Noting the relation between the social structure of the US and the growth of authoritarian tendencies Ray Dalio, founder of mammoth hedge fund Bridgewater Associates, warned in a recent interview with the *Financial Times* that wealth inequality was fueling the breakdown of democratic institutions. “I think that what is happening now politically and socially is analogous to what happened around the world in the 1930-40 period.” He pointed to “gaps in wealth” and “gaps in values,” as militating toward “more extreme” policies on both the right and the left. As an example of the latter, he noted the New York Democratic primary victory of Zohran Mamdani, a member of the

Democratic Socialists of America.

Meanwhile, the weekly toll of layoffs continues. Farm equipment maker John Deere announced Wednesday that 150 workers will be laid off at its Waterloo, Iowa facility. Another 72 are to be laid off next week from a previously announced layoff.

General Motors has announced a temporary layoff at its Wentzville, Missouri assembly plant due to a parts shortage September 29 -October 19. According to a notice posted by the United Auto Workers, most workers across all three shifts, 3,800 workers, will be impacted at the plant that builds GM’s mid-size pickup trucks and full-size vans. It should be noted in this regard that Trump’s tariffs have led to the disruption of global supply chains.

Spirit Airlines said it plans to cut its capacity by 25 percent starting in November and the move will likely be accompanied by layoffs.

Novo Nordisk is laying off 263 employees from its US headquarters in Plainsboro, New Jersey while another bio pharmaceutical firm, Bristol Myers Squibb is cutting 263 workers at its headquarters in Lawrenceville.

Amazon contractor Accelore Group, LLC has announced plans to cut more than 200 jobs at the company’s Amazon Logistics locations in Fort Worth and Balch Springs, Texas.

According to a survey by Resume.org of 1,000 employers, 58 percent of companies report they plan to lay off employees in 2026. So far in 2025, 39 percent have already conducted layoffs. Another 35 percent say they plan additional cuts by year end.

It is these conditions that are behind the increasingly aggressive turn to authoritarianism in the US. It is also fueling massive social discontent which inevitably must find expression in the eruption of ever more intense opposition from the working class. This social force must be provided an internationalist program and perspective aimed at the root cause of the societal breakdown, the capitalist profit system.



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