

The real issue in the government shutdown: Mobilize the working class against Trump's dictatorship!

Socialist Equality Party (US)
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The Trump administration, acting as a representative of the capitalist oligarchy, is using this week's government shutdown to implement an unprecedented assault on the working class, including mass layoffs and attacks on social programs, at the center of which is the erection of a military-police dictatorship.

The working class must intervene in this crisis, mobilizing its immense social power, to force the Trump administration from office and put an end to its criminal conspiracies. This struggle cannot be defined by or subordinated to the Democratic Party, which is opposed to any popular mobilization against Trump's ongoing coup d'état.

As many as 750,000 federal employees could be furloughed, across all government agencies except the apparatus of police-state violence and anti-immigrant repression. The administration has ordered every department to prepare "reductions in force" (RIFs), that is, mass firings, targeting especially those programs not deemed "consistent with the President's priorities." Russell Vought, Trump's budget director, said in a call with Republicans on Wednesday that these firings would begin "in a day or two."

The consequences will be devastating not only for the workers directly impacted, but for millions of people who rely on the limited services still provided by the government.

Vought's strategy is the implementation of the principles laid out in Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation blueprint for Trump's consolidation of power, which Vought co-authored. This includes a vast expansion of the power of the executive branch by establishing the "right" of the president to determine government spending, obliterating Congress's constitutional "power of the purse."

The present actions are a massive escalation of the assault already underway since Trump's return to power. Since coming to power, the administration has wiped out 200,000-300,000 federal jobs while gutting public health, dismantling environmental and workplace safety regulations, and moving to eliminate the Department of Education.

Facing mounting debt and deepening economic crisis, the Trump administration is preparing to slash the core social programs on which tens of millions rely—Medicare, Medicaid

and Social Security—while targeting WIC, food stamps and other vital assistance programs for the poor.

This is the class content behind the conspiracy to establish a fascistic military-police dictatorship. On the eve of the government shutdown, Trump and "Secretary of War" Pete Hegseth convened their meeting of generals and admirals at Quantico, where Trump and Hegseth demanded the loyalty of the officer corps and declared that US cities must serve as "training grounds" for military repression and violence.

The denunciations of the "enemy within," Trump's declaration of war on American cities, and the vilification of the "radical left" express the recognition by the capitalist oligarchy that its program will provoke mass opposition from the working class.

Under these conditions, the Democratic Party is absolutely incapable of and unwilling to pose the issues as they really are. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries declared meekly on Wednesday, "Democrats remain ready to find a bipartisan path forward to reopen the government in a way that lowers costs and addresses the Republican healthcare crisis. But we need a credible partner."

The Democrats are perpetually seeking some accommodation with Trump even as administration officials speak of the Democrats as a party of "domestic extremists." Moreover, to present the issue as if it were a conflict over healthcare is absurd. They know that the shutdown is being used to carry out mass firings and prepare the framework for dictatorship. By treating the crisis as a routine budget fight, they are playing directly into Trump's hands—and they know it.

Speaking for the Democrats, the *New York Times* published an editorial on Wednesday afternoon. Purporting to identify "the real stakes of the shutdown," the *Times* claimed, "What the two parties are fighting about is whether Americans should have access to affordable health care."

The *Times* avoided any mention of Trump's moves to deploy the military to occupy American cities, criminalize opposition and establish a dictatorship. It concluded with a plaintive appeal: "Now that it is too late to avert a shutdown, it is

incumbent on the president and Congress to reopen the government as soon as possible—and commit to preventing Americans from having to pay too much for health insurance next year.”

The *Times* editors, if they were transported to Germany in the 1930s, would perhaps be advising that it was “incumbent” upon Hitler to commit to universal welfare programs! Moreover, the claim that Democrats are “fighting” with Trump over healthcare is a lie.

The Democrats are not “negotiating,” let alone “fighting,” over access to healthcare. Their real and sole concern, the subject of discussions behind the scenes, is the war against Russia in Ukraine. On the essential issues of class policy, the Democrats, a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, are in agreement.

Given the extraordinary, criminal and unconstitutional actions of the Trump administration, the basic question is how to remove him from power. When the Democrats impeached Trump in 2019, it was not for his fascistic threats but over a delay in sending weapons to Ukraine. Today, there are not even suggestions of impeachment from the Democratic Party over actions that make the Watergate crisis, which resulted in Richard Nixon’s removal from the presidency in 1974, appear like child’s play. This is itself an act of complicity in Trump’s dictatorship.

The trade union apparatus, for its part, has no independent policy of its own. It functions as an appendage of either the Democratic Party or the Trump administration, depending on the particular allegiance of its leaders.

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler responded to the shutdown with a statement Wednesday, criticizing Trump for “choosing chaos and pain over responsible governing.” She declared, “The labor movement’s message to the administration is clear: Get to work. Fund the government. Fix the health care crisis. Put working people first.” While Trump threatens to use the military against American cities, Shuler pleads for him to “get to work”!

AFGE and AFSCME, which represent government workers, responded by declaring that the administration’s actions are “illegal,” “immoral” and “unconscionable,” and announced in response that they are ... filing a lawsuit. AFSCME president Lee Saunders said that the union would do “everything possible” to defend workers, but this does not include any actual action by the workers.

For the trade union apparatus, the central principle and article of faith is that, under any and all conditions, workers must do nothing. The apparatus functions as an industrial police force, deployed to enforce the dictates of the corporations and the state by blocking any struggle by the working class it claims to represent.

The working class cannot stand passively by as Trump plots military dictatorship and a war on the working class! The Socialist Equality Party calls for workers to respond to the

government shutdown and Trump’s conspiracy through mass, collective action.

Whatever the maneuvers of the Democratic Party during the shutdown, Trump will still be in power, and all the criminals who make up his administration will continue to rule on behalf of big business. Tens or hundreds of thousands of workers will have lost their jobs.

The working class must intervene in this unprecedented crisis with its own program. This requires organization. As the SEP explained in its September 19 statement, “Trump’s fascist conspiracy and how to fight it: A socialist strategy,” a central element in the strategy of the working class must be:

The building of a new form of organization that can unify the working class and mobilize its vast industrial and economic power against the Trump regime. This new form of organization proposed by the Socialist Equality Party consists of rank-and-file committees. They must be established in every factory, workplace, school and neighborhood to organize resistance to Trump’s dictatorship. These committees must become centers of resistance, uniting all sections of the working class (in industry, logistics, transport, restaurants and fast food, social services, legal defense, education, arts and culture, entertainment, medicine, health care, sciences, computer technology, programming and other highly specialized professions) and student youth against Trump’s fascist government, the complicity of the Democrats, and the broader assault on democratic rights and living standards.

The Socialist Equality Party has formed the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees (IWA-RFC) to develop a powerful mass working class movement.

The creation of rank-and-file committees is indispensable to break the stranglehold of the trade union bureaucracies, transfer power into the hands of the workers themselves and create new centers of coordinated social power for the defense of democratic rights. This is the path forward: the independent mobilization of the working class for socialism against dictatorship, war and capitalist exploitation.



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