Workers threatened with hunger as Trump's class war shutdown continues

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With the US government shutdown entering its third week, the second-longest in history, its impact on the American working class is intensifying. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, is expected to run out of funding as soon as next week, according to press reports.

A memo dated October 10 from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to state governments stated that while funding is sufficient to sustain the program through October, "there will be insufficient funds to pay full November SNAP benefits for approximately 42 million individuals across the nation." SNAP is jointly administered by the federal and state governments.

State agencies are already sending out warnings. The Texas Department of Health and Human Services warned that payments will not be made if the shutdown continues past October 27. Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services has stated that as of October 16, SNAP benefits will not be paid until the shutdown ends.

About one in eight Americans rely on food stamps, yet even with this assistance, roughly one in seven were still food insecure in 2023, according to Feeding America. If the program runs out of funding next month, it would trigger a rapid spread of hunger across the country.

SNAP has a contingency fund of $6 billion, according to CNN, but benefits for next month are projected to cost $8 billion. Even a 50 percent reduction in funding would require food banks to quadruple their output to meet the shortfall, Craig Rice, CEO of the Manna Food Center in Maryland, told NBC News.

On Tuesday, hundreds of federal workers lined up at a food pantry, after having gone three weeks without pay. "I'm overwhelmed by the line," Pastor Oliver Carter, organizer of the event, told CNN. "I didn't think we were going to have this many federal employees." One worker from the Social Security Administration told the channel: "You always thought that getting a government job or you know, a federal job, that that's security, and it's not."

The misery unleashed by the shutdown is by design. The Trump White House is using the crisis to slash funding, illegally fire thousands of workers and either eliminate social programs outright or render them inoperative.

Two weeks ago, the government announced over 4,000 permanent layoffs as part of its initial "reductions in force" (RIF), which a federal judge recently declared illegal. Trump has also raised the possibility that many government employees would not receive back pay.

Around 200,000 federal workers have already left their jobs this year, especially due to the jobs massacre under the "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE), previously controlled by Elon Musk.

Even without the shutdown, many food stamp recipients were already set to lose benefits due to tighter work requirements, reduced parental exemptions and the elimination of provisions for veterans and the homeless. The so-called "Big Beautiful Bill," passed over the summer, included more than $180 billion in cuts to food stamps. According to the Urban Institute, 22.3 million US families would lose some or all of their benefits under the changes. These cuts accompany roughly $800 billion slashed from Medicaid, measures designed to help finance $3 trillion in tax cuts and a massive $300 billion increase in military spending.

Meanwhile, Trump is spending almost $300 million to remodel the White House to add a gilded banquet hall to receive billionaire guests and other luminaries. The entire East Wing, previously the most publicly accessible part of the White House, is to be razed as part of the redesign.

A related goal of the shutdown is the seizure of personal control over the budget and the executive branch by Trump, the would-be fascist dictator, under the "unitary executive" theory developed by ultra-right Republicans.

In a filthy statement, the USDA sought to scapegoat immigrants for the loss of benefits, declaring: "We are approaching an inflection point for Senate Democrats. Continue to hold out for healthcare for illegals [a patently false claim repeatedly made by Republicans] or reopen the government so mothers, babies, and the most vulnerable among us can receive timely WIC and SNAP allotments."

The impact on food security underscores that Trump's plan for dictatorship is aimed above all against the working class. A major player in the strategy is Russell Vought, the head of the Office of Management and the Budget and co-author of the right-wing "Project 2025" playbook which the White House is largely following.

In an appearance last week on *The Charlie Kirk Show*—which continues to air with guest hosts following the assassination of its namesake—Vought boasted that the initial 4,000 layoffs were "just a snapshot, and I think it will get much higher. We're going to

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keep those RIFs rolling throughout this shutdown."

The government will be "very aggressive where we can be in shuttering the bureaucracy—not just the funding, but the bureaucracy." Vought estimated, "I think we'll probably end up being north of 10,000" jobs cut.

The ruling class is preparing for social unrest over the impact of the cuts. California Governor Gavin Newsom, who has postured as an opponent of Trump's deployment of the National Guard to Los Angeles, has announced that he is deploying the California National Guard to food banks across the state in a so-called "humanitarian" mission.

Other programs are also on the brink as the shutdown drags on. Tens of thousands of preschool children across 134 local Head Start programs will be affected if federal funding is not restored by November 1. According to the Associated Press, six programs have already missed their October funding disbursements.

Air traffic controllers (ATCs), who are being forced to work during the shutdown, are set to receive their first zero dollar "paycheck" next week, according to the union. ATCs are already massively overworked and dealing with aging equipment, which led to several near-disasters earlier this year. Staffing shortages and call-ins have contributed to dozens of flights being canceled during the shutdown.

Federal contractors will not receive back pay in many cases, and small businesses are being impacted by delays in green card and visa processing for foreign workers.

The *New York Times* also noted the potentially significant impact of the shutdown on credit markets, including the availability of affordable federal loans for the agricultural industry, which is already reeling from Trump's tariffs. "For farms and small businesses, October is a critical month for borrowing money," the paper wrote. "Some are paying their taxes, having gotten a six-month extension from the spring. Others are trying to stock up on inventory, or purchase equipment for the upcoming planting season."

Extreme-right Missouri Senator Josh Hawley, who played a major role in the January 6, 2021 coup attempt, has introduced bills to divert unspecified funding to food stamps and farm programs, claiming this will "hold Democrats' feet to the fire." This is political theatrics and the height of hypocrisy, given the Trump administration's policy of social counterrevolution.

But the Democrats are deliberately downplaying the dangers. Rather than warning of Trump's fascist program or doing any anything to oppose it, they have spent the shutdown issuing groveling appeals for Trump to "negotiate." At Saturday's "No Kings" protests, which drew an estimated 7 million people, Democratic politicians avoided any mention of fascism and urged attendees to place their faith in the courts—where Trump commands a 6–3 majority on the Supreme Court—and in next year's midterm elections, which may very well never take place.

In a filibuster speech on the Senate floor which began Tuesday evening and continued Wednesday, Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley declared, "We're in the most perilous moment, the biggest threat to our republic since the Civil War. President Trump is shredding our Constitution." But then, whitewashing the role of congressional Republicans, many of whom were directly involved in January 6, he added: "I don't believe there's a single senator here in the United States Senate who wants to see freedom crushed and authoritarian rule established here in the United States of America."

The role of the trade union bureaucrats has been to block any organized opposition in the working class. Nowhere is this clearer than among federal workers, tens of thousands of whom are being laid off or forced to work without pay. The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and other public sector unions have refused to call any strikes or even organize demonstrations, limiting their response to token legal appeals and hollow press statements while their members are driven into destitution.

The suppression of struggle by the union apparatus serves to give the Trump administration a free hand as it carries out its class war offensive. But this is exactly what must be opposed and overturned. As the Socialist Equality Party explained in a statement Tuesday:

> The working class has not yet intervened as an organized force, with its own program. This must change. The central target of all the Trump administration's actions is the working class. It is workers who are being thrown into unemployment by the mass firing of federal employees, who face the destruction of vital social programs, and who will suffer from the elimination of the Department of Education and the escalating attacks on teachers …
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> … There is a growing mood of social opposition and protest throughout the United States and internationally. The task now is not to wait passively for the next demonstration but to use this opposition as a lever in the fight for a movement of the working class for socialism.

This requires the building of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, office and community, independent of the pro-corporate unions and both big business parties. Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), workers must organize a unified counteroffensive against the Trump administration's social counterrevolution and developing drive toward dictatorship.

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