

California’s National Guard “humanitarian mission”: Newsom’s deployment to food banks marks a new stage in the militarization of social life

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California Governor Gavin Newsom’s announcement Monday that the California National Guard will be mobilized to assist food banks across the state has been widely presented by the media as a compassionate and pragmatic response to the worsening fallout from the federal government shutdown.

The deployment, Newsom said, is necessary to address an “urgent” situation caused by the shutdown’s interruption of federal assistance programs, particularly the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides food benefits to roughly 5.5 million Californians. “This is serious, this is urgent—and requires immediate action,” Newsom declared, pledging \$80 million in state funds to supplement food-bank operations and offset delayed federal payments.

What Newsom calls an “extraordinary measure” is in fact a damning indictment of capitalist society. Workers who produce society’s wealth are unable to afford basic nutrition, while the state mobilizes troops to distribute food rations like in a war zone. The federal shutdown itself, an act of deliberate economic sabotage carried out by a far-right Congress and a White House consumed by factional warfare, is only the immediate trigger for a crisis decades in the making.

California, often touted as a beacon of progressivism, is a state of staggering inequality. Silicon Valley billionaires amass fortunes measured in hundreds of billions while 5 million residents rely on food stamps and hundreds of thousands are homeless. In this context, Newsom’s “humanitarian” deployment of the National Guard is a political maneuver designed to

conceal the failure of capitalism under the banner of compassion.

Newsom was careful to frame the deployment as purely humanitarian, stressing that it would involve only logistical support for food distribution and that “this is not a law enforcement action.” He contrasted his move with President Donald Trump’s call to deploy National Guard troops in San Francisco under the pretext of fighting crime. “Trump’s failure isn’t abstract—it’s literally taking food out of people’s mouths,” Newsom said, positioning his own administration as the responsible alternative to Trump’s brutality and incompetence.

Such “humanitarian” missions are not new. For decades, US imperialism has cloaked military aggression abroad in the language of aid and protection, from Iraq and Yugoslavia to Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen, leaving behind shattered societies. The same ideological deception is now deployed domestically: under the pretext of helping the poor, the state conditions the public to see soldiers as saviors, while food distribution becomes a propaganda exercise to legitimize militarization.

The California Guard’s involvement, he reminded the public, is not unprecedented: during the COVID-19 pandemic, soldiers were similarly mobilized to distribute food and medical supplies. Yet the latest call-up marks a qualitative deepening of the trend to use the military as a stand-in for a collapsing civil infrastructure, in the context of Trump’s drive toward military dictatorship.

The underlying issue is not simply that millions of

people rely on food assistance, but that hunger on this scale exists in the richest state of the richest country on earth. Food banks are overwhelmed even in “normal” times. The shutdown, which has halted or delayed funding for vital programs from SNAP to WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), has turned chronic poverty into acute emergency.

The National Guard’s current “humanitarian” deployment is a dangerous precedent. Once in motion, such forces can be swiftly turned toward repression. Troops who distribute food today can be used tomorrow to quell demonstrations over hunger, layoffs, or unpaid benefits.

This danger is not theoretical: Guardsmen have already been deployed against protesters in Minnesota after George Floyd’s murder, at the U.S. Capitol, and along the southern border. Federal statutes such as the Insurrection Act grant presidents vast powers to federalize Guard units. The groundwork is being laid for the open use of the military against the working class on a national scale.

The deepening political crisis in Washington has brought relations between state and federal authorities to the breaking point. The ongoing government shutdown, now in its fourth week, reflects not mere dysfunction but a ruling class in disarray, terrorized by a rising wave of working class opposition and consumed by internal conflict. Trump, whose administration recently staged a reckless display of militarism at Camp Pendleton that nearly caused civilian casualties, is openly working to establish a personalist dictatorship based on the armed forces and police.

Trump has already sought to seize direct control of the California National Guard. Last June, US District Judge Charles R. Breyer ruled his attempted takeover from Governor Gavin Newsom illegal and unconstitutional. Yet Trump continues to press for expanded presidential authority over state military forces, preparing the legal and political framework for future interventions under the banner of “national security” or “domestic disorder.”

Newsom and other Democratic officials present themselves as defenders of democracy, but their opposition to Trump is entirely within the framework of defending capitalist rule. The clash between state and federal authorities recalls the tensions of the Civil

War era, however there is no progressive constituency among them: both sides represent the same oligarchic interests.

The use of the National Guard for hunger relief exposes the moral and political bankruptcy of American capitalism. A society that requires soldiers to distribute food is one in advanced decay.

After decades of enriching the financial aristocracy, the ruling class now confronts a population increasingly unable to survive within the existing system.

The crisis is not a temporary failure of funding or administration but a product of the capitalist system itself, which subordinates every human need to private profit. The same state that claims it cannot feed the hungry spends trillions on war and props up a handful of tech billionaires whose wealth dwarfs the state’s token \$80 million allocation for food aid.

Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans offer a solution. Both defend the profit system and the privileges of the oligarchy. The working class must reject this false humanitarianism and build its own independent organizations, rank-and-file committees that take democratic control of production and distribution. Food, housing, healthcare and education are social rights that must be guaranteed, not rationed by the military.

The resources to end hunger exist but are monopolized by a parasitic elite. A socialist program would expropriate their wealth, place major industries and banks under public ownership, and reorganize the economy to meet social needs, not corporate profit.



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