

Elon Musk's \$1 trillion payout and the case for expropriation

Andre Damon
7 November 2025

Elon Musk, the world's richest man with a net worth of \$461 billion, has been awarded by Tesla with a \$1 trillion pay package over 10 years, putting the CEO on course to becoming the world's first trillionaire.

This agreement would place Musk's annual compensation at approximately \$50 million per hour, or 3 million times higher than the starting wage at a Tesla factory of \$18 per hour.

In 1987, it was widely seen as a scandal when financier Michael R. Milken, the "junk bond king" who was later convicted of securities fraud, received \$500 million in a single year. Under Musk's pay deal, the Tesla CEO will be making nearly that amount every single day.

The fact that Tesla's shareholders approved Musk's unprecedented pay package the very week that the Trump administration cut off food stamp spending for tens of millions of people, and as millions of federal workers went unpaid amid a government shutdown, starkly expresses the fact that the enrichment of Musk and his fellow oligarchs takes place through the impoverishment and immiseration of the working class.

Musk's pay package, which eclipses the pay of any chief executive officer in world history by an order of magnitude, passed with the public support of major US financial institutions, including Charles Schwab Corporation and Morgan Stanley. The "yes" vote of 75 percent means that, behind the scenes, it is likely that most of Tesla's major shareholders, including Vanguard Group, BlackRock and Goldman Sachs, supported the pay package as well.

Their intent is clear: A new baseline will be set for the compensation of corporate executives and, more broadly, the financial oligarchy. Musk, once crowned the first trillionaire, will be the first of many, to be followed by the multi-trillionaires.

In order for Musk to achieve this payout, Tesla must deliver 20 million vehicles, put in place 1 million robotaxis, sell 1 million humanoid robots, and grow its valuation from \$1.5 trillion to \$8.5 trillion. The only way to achieve these milestones will be through a massive intensification of the

exploitation of the working class: both directly in Tesla factories and through the slashing of social spending and the injection of the resulting savings into the financial markets.

Thus, the awarding of Musk's pay package is, at the same time, a declaration of intent by the ruling class to massively impoverish the working class through layoffs, austerity and the destruction of social programs.

The rise of Musk's wealth embodies the vast enrichment of America's financial elite. His net worth, which stood at \$33 billion in March 2020, has since surged to \$469 billion, a 14-fold increase. During this time, the 10 richest individuals in America had their wealth increase six-fold.

Musk's wealth is built on a series of financial bubbles, each bigger than the last, and propped up by government bailouts and subsidies. Tesla, the source of most of Musk's wealth, embodies this speculative mania. Last year, Tesla made just \$5 billion in profit, and its global sales, revenue and profits are either stagnant or declining. Despite this, its stock share price has doubled since April.

With a market capitalization of nearly \$1.4 trillion, Tesla accounts for 90 percent of the market value of the US auto industry, though it sells just 12 percent of the US auto industry's vehicles. While it has a market capitalization 20 times greater than General Motors, it sells just one-quarter as many vehicles globally.

To the extent that investors buy and hold Tesla's shares, it is as a vehicle for speculation: not because they believe it will realistically sell more cars in the future, but because they believe its stock will increase in value.

But this is the case with the entire US stock market, which is in the midst of a massive bubble in technology stocks, whose valuations have no connection to the social impact—significant though it may be—of artificial intelligence and robotics.

Tesla accounts for just part of Musk's fortune. Musk owns substantial shares in the private company SpaceX, a vast portion of whose revenues come directly through the Department of Defense. Musk has been one of the leading beneficiaries of the wars of American imperialism.

SpaceX is widely regarded as the largest defense contractor in the world. It operates Starshield, a network of nearly 200 satellites used by the US military and its allies, and which the Trump administration is working to weaponize with missiles and directed energy weapons.

SpaceX likewise operates Starlink, the world's largest satellite internet network, which has received millions of dollars in Pentagon contracts, including to provide networking for US/NATO proxy troops in Ukraine.

Last week, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that SpaceX is set to receive a \$2 billion contract to build missile tracking satellites under the Trump administration's "Golden Dome" missile defense project.

In the final analysis, Musk sits atop a paper fortune, whose connection to underlying economic activity is largely a cover. It is, in the classic definition of a Ponzi scheme, indistinguishable from a normal business as long as the money flowing in exceeds the money flowing out.

It is this social reality that explains Musk's fascist politics. Musk's constant promotion of antisemitic dog whistles, embodied in his Nazi salute at the inauguration of Donald Trump, expresses the character of the capitalist oligarchy as a whole.

The Trump administration's escalating conspiracy to establish a presidential dictatorship expresses the interests of this oligarchy, which is waging a war on the working class, slashing social spending—spearheaded by Musk during his tenure as the head of Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). The main targets are all basic social programs, including Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

This frontal assault on the social rights of the working class is accompanied by an ever more direct fusion of the state, the oligarchy and the military. President Donald Trump, himself a billionaire, assembled the leading figures of the US financial oligarchy at his inauguration. At a White House meeting in September, Trump and the oligarchs—including Bill Gates (Microsoft); Tim Cook (Apple), Sundar Pichai (Google) and others—pledged mutual fealty, with Trump declaring his support for expanding the technology bubble while the technology oligarchs praised his administration.

The scene at the White House, followed just weeks later by a gathering of the same oligarchs with Trump and the British Monarchy at Windsor Castle, underscored the observation of Vladimir Lenin in his 1916 work, *Imperialism*: "The difference between the democratic-republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie is obliterated precisely because they are both rotting alive."

The determination by the financial oligarchy to defend its

wealth, privilege and power through the impoverishment of the working class and the assault on democratic rights will inevitably lead to the growth of resistance by the working class.

But this resistance must be armed with a clear understanding of its tasks. There can be no return to a "normal" capitalism. Any reduction in the rate of exploitation of the working class will lead to a total collapse of the financial bubble and is therefore completely and totally impermissible for the capitalist class. The financial elite, and all of its vast apparatus of repression and subversion, will fight tooth and nail to defend its wealth and social privileges.

In the late 1850s, American society faced what William Henry Seward called "an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces," which meant that the United States had to become "either entirely a slaveholding nation or entirely a free-labor nation."

Today, there is a similar "irrepressible conflict"—between capital, which is determined to destroy democratic forms of rule, and the working class, which is the vast majority of society, in the US and internationally.

This conflict can be resolved only through the expropriation of the oligarchy. The wealth hoarded by the billionaires must be seized and the major corporations, banks and industries—those that determine the conditions of social life—placed under public ownership and democratic workers' control. Only in this way can the immense productive capacities of modern society be freed from the parasitic grip of the capitalist class and used to abolish poverty, inequality and war.

Such a transformation will not come through appeals to the morality of the rich or tinkering around the edges of capitalist society. It requires the conscious, organized intervention of the working class itself—the building of a mass, independent movement of workers in every industry, city and country. The working class must mobilize its collective power on an international scale.

The fight against inequality, austerity and dictatorship is, necessarily, a struggle for socialism—the reorganization of economic life on the basis of human need, not private profit.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact