



December 21, 2024

Lawmakers ready stopgap spending bill: No cuts now, but watch out later

By Mark Gruenberg

WASHINGTON—With just three days to go before the politically split and ideologically fractured current Congress ends its two-year dysfunctional run, lawmakers readied themselves to vote, possibly as early as today but no later than December 20, on a stopgap spending bill to extend most current money levels through March.

The good news is, if they approve it, the government's lights stay on, checks go out, planes keep flying, vets keep getting medical care and other services—from food inspections to Labor Department job safety enforcement—keep going. And there'll be more aid funneled to hurricane victims, too.

The bad news is that by punting tough decisions and votes into the next, totally Republican-run Congress, plus the incoming GOP Trump regime, some of the nastier anti-worker measures already envisioned—see below—can then come to fruition, unless workers can recruit enough allies to put pressure on to stop them.

Meanwhile, in both the temporary money bill and next year's "permanent" one, a trillion dollars would still flow to the Pentagon's war machine, and its contractors.

Key provisions of the 1500-page temporary money bill include:

- A one-year extension of federal subsidies to farmers and ranchers. The annual farm bill, which OKs such aid, also includes money for the food stamp program, but it was unclear if that's in the temporary bill, too. And most traditional farm aid goes to agribusiness, not family farmers.
- A crackdown, which both political parties support, on pharmacy benefit managers, one of the top cost drivers in the ever-more expensive U.S. health care non-system.

The PBMs, featuring reams of bean counters who know little⁴ if anything about medicine and its effectiveness, arbitrarily rule which drugs are in and which are out of your insurer's coverage. The difference to consumers can be hundreds of dollars per prescription or more. The PBMs, largely unregulated, favor steering patients to higher-cost drugs, because PBMs get higher commissions.

- Renewing federal research and drug distribution to control future pandemics, despite screams from the right about "government interference" mandating vaccinations against the coronavirus.
- Keeping Medicare and Medicaid physician payments at current levels, not cutting them. The bill is silent, though on insurers' setting pay.
- About \$110 billion more in emergency and disaster funding to help victims of floods, hurricanes and wildfires. The funds "will help Americans rebuild and recover" from disasters, said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., the top House Appropriations Committee Democrat.



But the bill doesn't have any "offsets," grabbing money from elsewhere to pay for disaster aid. That may trigger a revolt by the "Freedom Caucus," Trumpite Republicans whose tail wags the party's dog.

- Federal funds to rebuild the Francis Scott Key bridge over the entrance to Baltimore harbor. The bridge is a key link for north-south truck trade and car traffic on the East Coast. The money is supposed to be recouped, eventually, from the owners and operators of the container cargo ship that crashed into the bridge's central pier earlier this year, sending the entire span into the muddy water, and killing six workers.

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CONTINUING THE DAILY WORKER



For over a century, People's World and its predecessor publications have taken the side of the 99 percent and worked to promote the struggle for a sustainable environment, jobs, democracy, peace, and equality.

No cuts now, but watch out later

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Sponsoring Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., didn't mention payments to the families of the workers, all of them migrants from Central America. The International Longshoremen's Association stepped in after the bridge crashed into the bay last March to aid the families.

- Funding for at least the next three years for health care and benefits for Fire Fighters, Operating Engineers, Laborers and others who combed through the toxic ruins of al-Qaeda's destruction of the World Trade Center more than two decades ago, and/or their survivors.

"This solves our current projected deficit that would have forced cuts to program services in as little as three years and harmed 9/11 responders and survivors. This new formula, which will begin in 2026, provides substantially more funding and peace of mind," said Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.

- A rewrite of federal adult workforce development programs to make them stronger and more effective. The "Stronger Workforce for America Act ensures workers will benefit from innovative workforce development programs and be able to access to good-paying jobs," said lead sponsor Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va.

The measure will devote half of all adult workforce development dollars to "upskilling workers through 'individual training accounts,' on-the-job learning, and wrap-around supports, while redirecting an existing funding stream toward ITAs for displaced workers" a bill summary says. Employers, though, will pick the jobs workers can be trained for.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., told reporters he sought "a very simple, very clean" stopgap funding bill "to get us into next year when we have a unified government."

But that "unified government" of all-Republican control could spell bad news for workers, a close reading of key regular House-crafted money bills—all from Republicans—shows. That's because their provisions, which would not take effect until next March, if then, include:

- A \$74.5 million cut, to \$557 million overall, for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Of that, all \$12.8 million for training grants would go. The rest represents a \$61 million cut in enforcement money, to \$182 million. Less funding equals less enforcement, little as it is now.
- Less job safety and health research too, if the GOP has its way in March. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health would lose \$100 million, declining to \$200 million.

- A \$99 million cut, to \$200 million, for the National Labor Relations Board, which is already understaffed. That cut would take the NLRB back, in current dollars, not counting inflation, to its funding of 12 years ago. The Republicans also criticize board General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo, though not by name, for memos and board rulings the GOP says hamper corporate communications with workers, among other issues.
- A complete cutoff of all family planning money for Planned Parenthood, including pre-natal care, because Planned Parenthood clinics perform abortions.
- An order to all teleworking feds to return fulltime to their desks by the middle of next year, overriding union contracts which provide more leeway and studies which show hybrid part-telework, part-office jobs are more productive.

Republicans scream about lazy federal work from home. The leaders of Trump's cut-the-government commission, millionaire Vivek Ramaswamy and billionaire Elon Musk, openly root for tens of thousands of feds to quit. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, a pro-business Democrat, wants her downtown full of workers again.

- The House Appropriations bill which covers federal workers—and which wouldn't take effect before April, if it passed and Trump signed it, has a zero percent pay raise. It also has language to let Trump start to fire 50,000 top civil servants, turning what he calls "the deep state" into a spoils system like that of the Gilded Age.

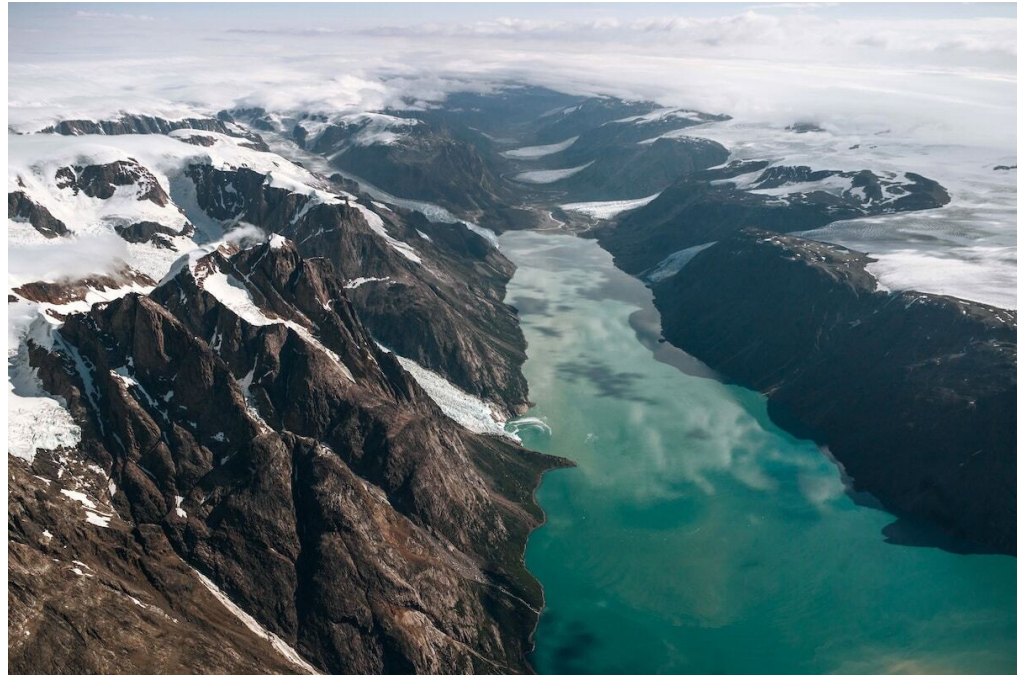
"The sort of broadsides against federal employee telework paint a picture of federal employees as people who are committing fraud against the American people, and collecting paychecks without performing the duties of their jobs, which is simply not true," Jacqueline Simon, public policy director of the Government Employees (AFGE), told Portside Labor.

- "For the second year in a row, the majority's bill prophesies the complete destruction of public education," Connecticut Democrat Rosa DeLauro wrote. This year's cuts—which again wouldn't hit before March—"decimate support for K-12 education—including cuts that would take at least 72,000 teachers out of low-income classrooms—and abandons college students and lower-income workers trying to gain an education."
- Huge cuts, of up to two-thirds, in funds for building mass transit systems, buying buses and renovating Amtrak trains and stations.
- Cutting "the sole program dedicated to constructing new affordable workforce housing by 60% despite a 12% increase in homelessness nationally."
- That prospective money bill would also kill legal aid and tenant protections against evictions. It even ends funding to eliminate lead-based paint in public housing. And it reduces anti-discrimination enforcement in public housing, too.

For the first time, scientists observe one of the planet's largest glacial floods in Greenland

By Cristen Hemingway Jaynes

Catalina Lake in East Greenland, where scientists recently observed glacial flooding in real time, photographed in 2013. | NASA



Scientists have, for the first time, observed the unleashing of an enormous glacial lake flooding event in East Greenland. The rare outburst involved 3,000-plus billion liters of meltwater bursting forth in a matter of weeks.

Witnessed by researchers from the University of Copenhagen, the natural phenomenon provides insight into the powerful and potentially dangerous forces that can be released by meltwater, a press release from University of Copenhagen's Niels Bohr Institute said.

"Imagine an enormous bathtub atop a mountain filled with water equivalent to three times Denmark's annual water consumption, and then suddenly bursting. This is essentially what happened when the massive Catalina Lake in East Greenland released 3.4 cubic kilometers of meltwater — 3,000 billion liters — into the Scoresby Sound fjord," the press release said.

The enormous volume of water released by the lake made it one of the three largest events of its kind ever to be documented.

The meltwater outburst flood happened from September 23 to October 11, during which time the water level of Catalina Lake fell by 154 meters. The scientists were able to use satellite imagery to observe the spectacle in real time.

"We have previously found traces of similar outburst floods, but due to polar night and clouds obstructing the potential for satellite observations, this is the first time that researchers have been able to monitor an event and measure the water volumes in real time," explained Aslak Grinsted, a climate researcher with the Niels Bohr Institute, in the press release.

The outburst flood was caused by the accumulation of meltwater from Catalina Lake over the last two decades. The lake sits nestled in a valley obstructed by the Edward Bailey Glacier. As the lake filled up, the water started to lift the glacier, resulting in a 25-kilometer-long, carved-out tunnel underneath the ice. The pressure from the water building up finally caused it to burst into Scoresby Sound, the largest fjord on Earth.

The phenomenon of a glacial lake gradually filling and releasing its meltwater in a rush is known as a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF).

Events such as this have been happening more often in the past 30 years due to global heating and climate change.

"The danger from glacier-dammed lakes is increasing due to global warming. It's vital to improve our understanding of this phenomenon to issue timely warnings should there be an imminent risk," Grinsted warned.

The recent GLOF in East Greenland did not cause any harm due to the area's sparse population. However, floods like this can be catastrophic in more populated areas such as the Himalayas, where villages are frequently destroyed. A 2023 study found that 15 million people globally live under threat of dangerous glacial floods.

"I expect that we will witness outbursts from even larger ice-dammed lakes as Greenland's ice sheet retreats in coming centuries. At the end of the last Ice Age, Lake Missoula had an outburst that was 2,500 times larger than the recent Catalina event. To understand these massive forces, we must study the largest outbursts when they occur," Grinsted said. "In this case, the energy released by the glacier flood was equivalent to the output of the world's largest nuclear power plant running at full capacity for 22 days."

Grinsted said it was worth considering how the incredible power of such natural phenomena could be harnessed as a green energy source. The energy produced by the event at Catalina Lake could theoretically have generated 50 megawatts of electricity, which is enough to power a small town.

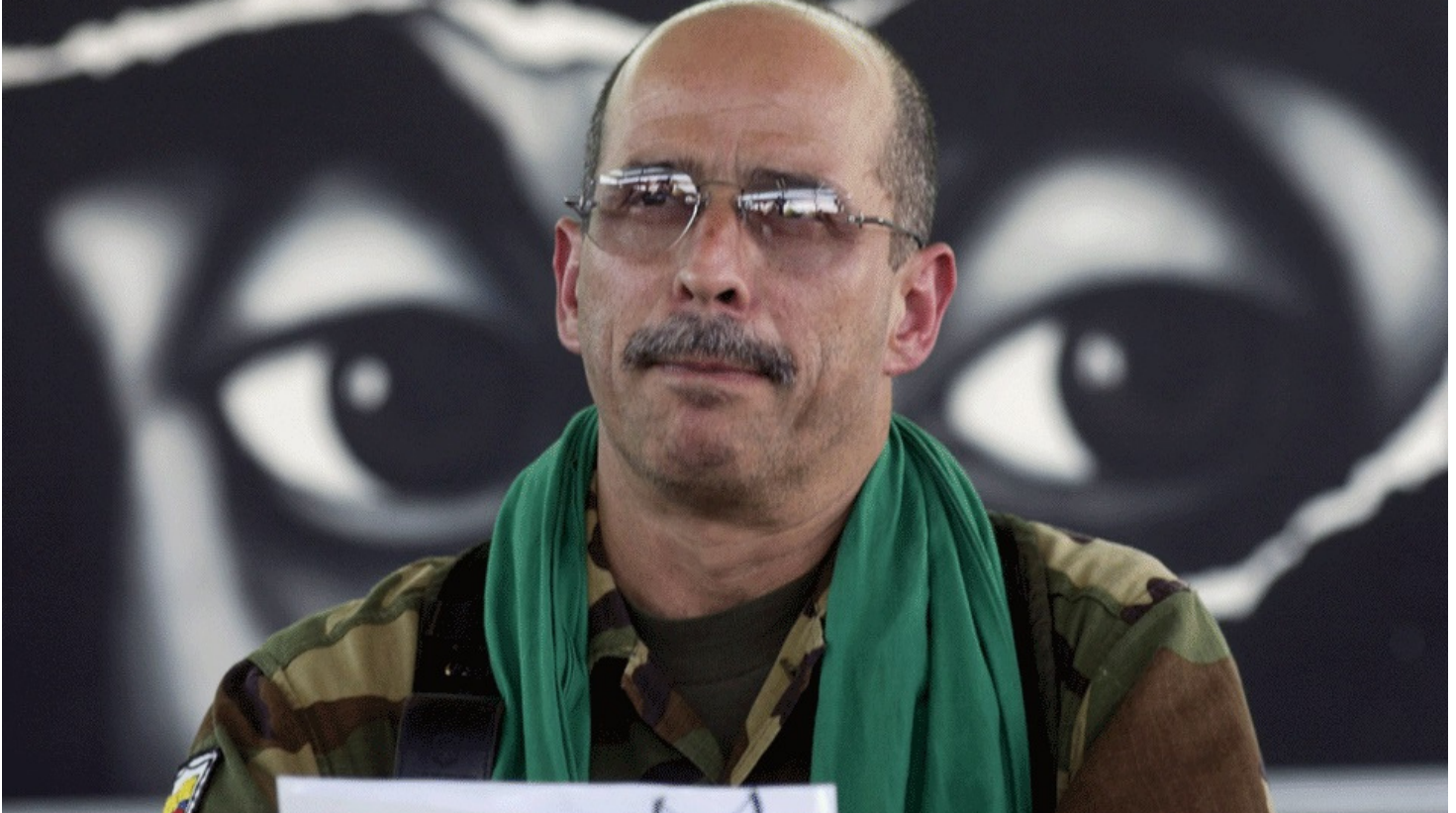
In this instance, however, the closest human settlement of 350 residents was 180 kilometers away, which would pose a major technological challenge for energy transmission and potential use.

"As with many other natural resources in Greenland, infrastructure is a problem. But if a brilliant engineer could figure out how to harness these meltwater outbursts, there's enormous power and energy potential in them," Grinsted concluded.

"The danger from glacier-dammed lakes is increasing due to global warming. It's vital to improve our understanding of this phenomenon to issue timely warnings should there be an imminent risk," says Grinsted.

President Biden, release Simón Trinidad from prison now! Let him return to Colombia!

By W. T. Whitney Jr.



President Biden recently pardoned his son Hunter Biden and commuted the sentences of 1,499 drug offenders. Analyst Charles Pierce insists Biden should also pardon Simón Trinidad. We join this plea on behalf of Colombian Ricardo Palmera, whose nom de guerre is Simón Trinidad. Biden must indeed release Trinidad and let him return to Colombia.

Trinidad, a former leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), has been imprisoned since 2008. U.S. agents arranged for his capture in Ecuador in 2003. Charged with drug trafficking, Trinidad was extradited from Colombia to the United States in late 2004. Juries in two of his four trials there failed to convict him of narco-trafficking. Two trials were required to convict Trinidad of a terrorist conspiracy to hold hostage three U.S. military contractors operating in Colombia.

The 2016 Peace Agreement between Colombia's government and the FARC offered a process for combatants to leave war behind. The Agreement produced the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), a device whereby Trinidad could tell the truth about participating in civil war and possibly gain immunity from further punishment once he arrived in Colombia.

Trinidad's defenders claim that his earlier experience as a negotiator for the FARC amply qualifies him to help overcome the difficulties still damaging prospects for peace in Colombia.

Trinidad is presently serving a 60-year sentence—20 years for each of the captured North Americans. Early release from prison for Trinidad would make partial amends for an excessively long sentence and relieve him of the cruelty marking his prison experience.

President Gustavo Petro's Colombia's government is now finally pressuring the Biden administration to return Trinidad to Colombia. A note sent from the Colombian Embassy on November 12 proposes that "in a humanitarian spirit and for the purpose of [Trinidad] contributing to Colombia's peace agenda, we present a request for a presidential pardon."

In a request first made in early 2023, Colombia still seeks "necessary technical facilities" for Trinidad so that he might participate in "virtual sessions" of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. Once repatriated, he could then fully participate in "the search for total peace in Colombia."

Ironically enough, the U.S. government has expressed support for the peace process in Colombia, both during four years of negotiation and after the Agreement was signed in 2016.

Simón Trinidad came from a wealthy, politically powerful, and landowning family in César Department in northern Colombia. He prepared as an economist. Before joining the FARC in 1987, he managed an agricultural bank and his family's estates and taught at a local university.

In reaction to the accentuation of class-based bloody conflict in Colombia's rural areas, ongoing for decades, his politics changed. Joining with others, he opposed the Colombian government's tolerance of paramilitary killings of office-holders and adherents of the Patriotic Union electoral coalition, from 1985 on. They were Communist Party members, former FARC guerrillas, and other progressives. Well over 5,000 of them would be massacred.

release Simón Trinidad from prison now!

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Within the FARC, Trinidad was involved in political education, propaganda, and negotiations with foreign agencies and political leaders. He served as a lead negotiator and spokesperson during the failed FARC-Colombian government peace negotiations in San Vicente del Caguán from 1998 to 2002.

Here are good reasons for Trinidad's U.S. imprisonment to end, and for him to return to Colombia now:

- The federal prison in Florence, Colorado, where Trinidad is held, "is one of the strictest maximum-security prisons in the world." He remained in solitary confinement for 12 years. Authorities restrict his outside communication to infrequent contact with very few family members. Visits are few and far between.
- The conspiracy charge against him amounts to no more than membership in the FARC. That insurgency sought revolutionary social change. International law recognizes both the right to revolution and the rights of prisoners of war.
- FARC guerrillas in 2003 shot down the plane carrying the three U.S. military contractors and took them hostage. They were "three retired military officers who provided intelligence services through private companies." The FARC regarded them as enemy combatants. They went free in 2008. Simón Trinidad was far removed geographically and command-wise from the decision to bring down their plane. In view of such circumstances, Trinidad's 60-year jail sentence is wildly disproportionate.

- Mind-reading has its hazards, but appearances may be suggestive. Pains taken to prosecute and persecute Simón Trinidad speak to his status as a "trophy" prisoner for his U.S. captors – as indicated by Trinidad's U.S. attorney Mark Burton. Under the pretext of the drug war, the U.S. government in 2000 introduced its "Plan Colombia" program of military assistance directed at ridding Colombia of leftist insurgents – to the tune eventually of \$10 billion. Simón Trinidad's prominent role in the recently failed Caguán peace talks showed off Plan Colombia as meeting expectations; an exalted prisoner like Trinidad was now in U.S. hands.

There would be the possibility too that Trinidad had earned the special ire of the entitled classes in both Colombia and the United States. Born with a silver spoon, he was indeed a traitor to his class.

Simón Trinidad as a special case is clear in comparing his fate with that of major paramilitary boss Salvatore Mancuso, reliably accused of killing 1,500 Colombians. Each faced trials in the United States after extradition on narco-trafficking charges. Mancuso served his 15-year sentence and in February 2024 was allowed to return to Colombia. President Gustavo Petro honored him through an appointment as "peace manager as part of" [his] 'Total Peace' initiative." Mancuso, but not Simón Trinidad, has testified before the JEP.

Attorney Mark Burton regards Trinidad as a friend: "To know him is to admire him because he is an intelligent, human man, and also very firm in his political and social ideas. There are not many people like him in life. He is a person that in the worst prison in the United States they have not been able to break him. He is a person with firmness, ideas, and character. That alone is worth admiration."

End the cruel and hypocritical attack on Cuban sovereignty

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

The CPUSA International Department issued this statement on Friday, Dec. 20 on the occasion of the Cuban people's demonstration against the blockade in front of the U.S. embassy in Havana.

Comrades, at this critical moment, the Communist Party of the United States of America reaffirms its commitment to the Cuban Revolution and its people in their struggle for justice, sovereignty, and socialism.

The U.S. designation of Cuba as a "state sponsor of terrorism" is a baseless slander, reflecting U.S. imperialist hostility towards nations that dare to defend their independence. It is a flagrant hypocrisy for a country like the United States, with its long history of interventions, violence, and support for dictatorial regimes around the world, to accuse Cuba of terrorism. The fight against unjust sanctions is a fight for the dignity of all peoples around the world who defend their right to self-determination. It is time for the U.S. government to cease its economic warfare and systematic aggression against Cuba!

The Communist Party of the United States condemns the cruel and brutal policy of the blockade which continues to affect the everyday lives of Cubans and must be lifted immediately.

The Communist Party of the United States will work to mobilize a massive coalition and pressure the U.S. government to remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Cuba is not a state sponsor of terrorism, but a nation that has worked tirelessly for peace, international cooperation, and social justice, even collaborating with the United States in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. It is unacceptable for the U.S. government to continue using the "terrorist" classification as a tool to cause the suffering of the Cuban people.

Today, at this protest in front of the U.S. Embassy in Havana, we raise our voices with you to demand that Cuba be removed from this list, that the blockade be lifted, and that U.S. imperialism cease to be an obstacle to global progress and peace.

We are with you in the fight for justice, freedom, and socialism. Long live the Cuban Revolution! Until victory, always!

Annexing the West Bank: Why Israel might pounce once Trump is back

By Ramzy Baroud

Israel is getting ready to officially annex the occupied Palestinian West Bank. The annexation will be a major step backwards on the road to Palestinian freedom and will likely serve as a catalyst for a new Palestinian uprising, another intifada.

Though annexation has been on the Israeli agenda for years, this time around, a “great opportunity”—in the words of extremist Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich—has presented itself and, from an Israeli point of view, cannot be missed.

“I hope we’ll have a great opportunity with the new U.S. administration to create full normalization [of the Israeli occupation],” the minister was quoted as saying by Israeli media. This is not the first time that Smotrich, among other Israeli extremists, has made the connection between Trump’s advent to the White House and the illegal expansion of Israel’s borders.

Two reasons make Israel’s far right optimistic about Trump’s arrival: One, the Israeli experience during Trump’s first term in office, where the U.S. president allowed Israel to claim sovereignty over illegal settlements, the Syrian Golan Heights, and occupied East Jerusalem; and, two, Trump’s more recent statement in the run-up to the elections.

Israel is “so tiny” on the map, Trump said while addressing the pro-Israeli group Stop Antisemitism at an event last August, wondering: “Is there any way of getting more?”

The statement, absurd by any definition, caused joy among Israeli politicians, who understood it to be a green light for further annexations.

Israel’s aims for colonial expansion also received a boost in recent days. Following the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s rule in Syria, Israel immediately began invading large swathes of the country, reaching as far as the Quneitra governorate, less than 13 miles (20 kilometers) away from the capital, Damascus.

What is taking place in Syria serves as a model of what to expect in the West Bank in the coming months.

Israel had occupied nearly 70% of the Syrian Golan Heights in 1967. It cemented its illegal occupation of the Arab region by formally annexing it in 1981 through the so-called “Golan Heights Law.”

That illegal move came shortly after another illegal annexation, that of occupied Palestinian East Jerusalem the previous year.

Although the West Bank was not formally annexed, the boundaries of East Jerusalem have expanded well beyond its historic borders, thus swallowing large parts of the West Bank.

The West Bank, like East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, are all recognized as illegally occupied territories under international law. Israel has no legal basis to maintain its occupation, let alone annexation of any Palestinian or Arab region. It is allowed to do so, however, due to U.S. and Western support and international silence.

But why is Israel keen on annexing the West Bank now?

Aside from the “great opportunity” linked to Trump’s return to power, Israel’s rulers feel that their military’s ability to sustain a genocidal war on Gaza without any international intervention to bring the extermination to an end, would make the annexation of the West Bank a far less consequential matter on the international agenda.

Even though the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had issued a decisive ruling on the illegality of the Israeli occupation on July 19, followed by the issuing of arrest warrants of top Israeli leaders by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on Nov. 21, no action was taken to hold Israel accountable.

The annexation of the West Bank is unlikely to change that, especially as Israel conducts its wars and illegal actions through direct U.S. support.

Indeed, the Democratic administration under President Joe Biden has financed and supported all Israeli wars, including the current genocide. Trump is expected to be equally generous, or at least, not at all critical. All of this in mind, the annexation of the West Bank in the coming weeks or months is a real possibility.

In fact, Smotrich had already informed “workers of the defense ministry body in charge of Israeli and Palestinian civil affairs in the West Bank” about his plans to “shut down the department as part of an envisioned Israeli annexation of the area,” the Times of Israel reported on Dec. 6.

While such annexation will not change the legal status of the West Bank, it will have dire consequences for the millions of Palestinians living there, as annexation is likely to be followed by a violent campaign of ethnic cleansing, if not from the whole of the West Bank, certainly from large parts of it.

Annexation will also render the Palestinian Authority legally irrelevant—as it was created following the Oslo Accords to administer parts of the West Bank in anticipation of a future sovereignty, which never actualized. Will the Palestinian Authority agree to remain functional as part of the Israeli military administration of a newly annexed West Bank?

Palestinians will certainly resist, as they always do. The nature of the resistance will prove critical in the success or failure of the Israeli scheme. A popular intifada, for example, will overstretch the Israeli military, which will use an unprecedented degree of violence to suppress Palestinians but will unlikely succeed.

Annexing the West Bank at a time that Palestine, and in fact the whole region, is in turmoil is a recipe for perpetual war, which, from the viewpoint of Smotrich and his ilk, is the actual “great opportunity,” as it will secure their political survival for years to come.

Teamsters put Amazon on notice: Bargain in good faith or we walk

By Cameron Harrison

A truck arrives at the Amazon warehouse facility, in the Staten Island borough of New York, April 1, 2022. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders has opened a Senate investigation into Amazon's warehouse safety practices, the latest in a series of probes he's initiated against big corporations in his role as chairman of a committee that oversees health and labor issues. | Eduardo Munoz Alvarez/AP



WASHINGTON—"Time has run out for this trillion-dollar company," said Teamsters President Sean O'Brien. "The Teamsters are done asking nicely for Amazon to stop breaking the law. Amazon must commit to come to the table and bargain a Teamsters contract with its workers—or face the consequences of its inaction."

Earlier this month, the Teamsters' Amazon Labor Union's local gave the monster warehouse and retail firm a deadline of December 15 to follow the law and agree to bargaining dates for a union contract. That date has since passed and no bargaining dates were set as of press time.

A strike during the holiday season, when Amazon is at its busiest, would be a major blow to the e-commerce giant. The scale of the strike, with more than 20 warehouse and driver units across the country, would be unprecedented.

The refusal by Amazon to bargain in good faith, or at all, is unsurprising, especially for Amazon Labor Union-IBT Local 1 workers at the Staten Island, N.Y., JFK8 facility. They were the first workers to organize and win a union at Amazon in an historic victory over two years ago. They have been fighting for a contract ever since and faced unprecedented union-busting and delay tactics from Amazon.

Now they're not alone

But now they're not alone. In addition to the Amazon workers at JFK8, the DBK4 delivery center in Queens and DIL7 delivery center in Skokie, Ill., all overwhelmingly authorized unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes at their facilities.

At both of those warehouses, the Teamsters cited Amazon's "illegal refusal to recognize their union and negotiate a contract" to address low wages and dangerous working conditions at Amazon warehouses as the reason for walking out.

"Amazon's refusal to negotiate is a direct attack on our rights," said Connor Spence, president of ALU-IBT Local 1. "If Amazon chooses to ignore us, they're the ones ruining Christmas for millions of families. We're not just fighting for a contract; we're fighting for the future of worker power at Amazon and beyond."

"Driving for Amazon is tough," said Luc Rene, a worker at the DBK4 warehouse. "What's even tougher is fighting a mega-corporation that constantly breaks the law and games the system. But we won't give up."

Amazon now has more than 700,000 workers, making it the largest employer of warehouse workers in the nation, a report from the University of Illinois at Chicago said. Around 41% of its warehouse workers report being injured while working at Amazon and 51% of those at the company for more than three years have been injured. A whopping 69% had to take unpaid time off due to pain or exhaustion from working at the company in the past month and 34% have had to do so three or more times.

Prior AFL-CIO studies of warehouse workers' injury data show Amazon employs one of every three warehouse workers in the U.S., but its reported injuries account for one of every two workers harmed on the job.

"It's constant speed-up during the holidays," said Justine Medina, who works at JFK8. "Every horror story you read about Amazon is true, but worse."

Riley Holzworth, a worker at DIL7 in Skokie, said that while Amazon is one of the biggest companies on the planet, "we are struggling to pay our bills."

Bargain in good faith or we walk

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Earlier this month, in Georgia, Amazon drivers at the [DGT5 and DGT8](#) facilities organized with the Teamsters and demanded union recognition with a march on the boss. They joined another 1,000-plus workers at the [KSBD air hub](#) in California who did the same. Now, they are all part of the more than 7,000 Amazon workers in multiple states who joined the Teamsters to take on Amazon's rampant corporate greed and secure better—and safer—working conditions.

Daniel Salinas, an air hub worker at KSBD, said Amazon workers across the country are organizing because they have simply had enough.

“The disrespect we face every day from management while working long hours and doing back-breaking work is a disgrace,” he said.

Over the weekend, the workers got support from pro-labor Bernie Sanders, Ind-Vt., as well. “Amazon delivery drivers and warehouse workers deserve decent wages, benefits and working conditions—and the right to form a union,” he said.

Sanders adds more evidence

Sanders, who chairs the Senate Labor Committee, added even more evidence to the workers' cause. His panel released an extensive report on safety conditions within Amazon warehouses. Key findings included injury rates far higher than the industry norm and that two-thirds of the warehouses had abnormally high rates. And that Amazon fudged the injury figures it reported to federal probers.

The high rates were due to a company-wide mandate of speed over safety, complete with intensive tracking of workers' package productivity rates. And Amazon knew it, for at least the last seven years.

“When internal studies recommended efforts that might reduce workers' pace—and potentially hurt the company's bottom line—Amazon chose not to act on the findings. In short, the investigation found Amazon is not only aware of the connection between speed and injuries, but the company specifically rejected potential safety improvements, accepting injuries to its workers as the cost of doing business.

“Workers told the committee about Amazon regularly ignoring safety concerns, ordering workers to stay in roles that were causing them pain, denying workers needed medical care or pressuring them to return to work too soon, and refusing accommodations for work-related injuries as well as disabilities.”

Amazon disputed the conclusions from the 18-month investigation, saying the panel's data was out of date and out of context but produced no contradictory evidence. Panel probers had to rely on workers' testimony and federal documents. The workers came forward despite the risk of being fired.

Federal fines were no deterrent to Amazon driving its workers at a breakneck injurious pace. Amazon's response to high injury rates are a key union talking point in the Teamsters organizing drive at the firm.

“OSHA's maximum penalties are just over \$16,000 for each serious violation,” the panel probers found. Even for a company like Amazon, which repeatedly violates federal regulations, these penalties amount to very little: OSHA's proposed penalties for more than 50 violations included in citations to Amazon over a two-year period totaled less than \$300,000. That is approximately 1% of Amazon CEO Andy Jassy's total compensation in 2023.”

Sanders's probers interviewed more than 130 Amazon workers and met with nearly 500 employees who shared 1,400 documents. The panel report concluded there is “extensive evidence of a corporate culture obsessed with speed and productivity” at Amazon.

“Amazon expects workers to move at unsafe rates and in unsafe conditions that cause workers to be injured far more frequently than they are at other warehouse,” the report said. A smaller report, from New York state three years ago, uncovered similar hazardous working conditions at warehouses there.

“Thousands of Amazon workers around the country have courageously united to take on one of the world's most abusive employers. Amazon has a legal obligation to recognize the Teamsters and to start negotiating,” Teamsters President O'Brien said in a statement.

“The way Amazon treats its workers is un-American. Amazon's so-called ‘leaders’ should treat their workers fairly—they just want to put food on the table for their families. Instead, Amazon executives risk ruining the holidays for their customers because of their addiction to putting profits over people.”

The ball is now in the company's court for what happens next. The clock is ticking. The Teamsters said they will protect their members at all costs and are prepared to come after Amazon with the full force of the union to get the contract workers earned.

Sizzle Pie: Oregon pizza workers face firings and union-busting

By Sherlea Dony

An elderly shopper searches for a bargain in the meat section of a grocery store in Harlem. / John Minchillo / AP



I worked hard my whole career and retired feeling secure. Then I lost every last dime in a scam. I was left with \$1,300 a month in Social Security benefits to live on in an area where [monthly expenses run about \\$3,700](#).

I'm a smart woman, but scams against older Americans are [increasing](#) in number and [sophistication](#). Whether through scams, strained savings, or costs of living going up, [half of older Americans](#) — that's 27 million households — can't afford their basic needs.

And suddenly I became one of them. The experience has taught me a lot about the value of a strong social safety net — and why we'll need to protect it from the coming administration.

I was ashamed and frightened after what happened, but I scraped myself up off the floor and tried to make the best of it.

I'd worked with aging people earlier in my career, so I was familiar with at least some of the groups who could help. I reached out to a local non-profit and they came through with flying colors, connecting me to life-saving federal assistance programs.

I was assigned a caseworker, who guided me through applying for public programs like the [Medical Savings Plan \(MSP\)](#), the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#), [subsidized housing](#), [Medicare Part D](#), and [Medicaid](#).

It's hard to describe my relief at getting this help.

Before receiving the MSP, I'd been paying for medications and health insurance — which cost about \$200 — out of my monthly Social Security check. With MSP, that cost is covered.

I also found an apartment I liked through subsidized housing, and I have more money for groceries through SNAP. Now it's easier to afford other necessities, like hearing aid batteries and my asthma inhaler.

But I'm worried about the incoming administration's plans to [cut programs](#) like these, which have helped me so much. They're proposing slashing funding and [imposing overly burdensome work and reporting requirements](#). [Studies](#) show that requirements like these can cause millions of otherwise eligible people to lose critical assistance.

President-elect Trump has also indicated that he favors increased privatization of Medicare, which [would result in higher costs and less care](#). And his tax promises are projected to move up the [insolvency](#) date of Social Security.

All told, the federal budget cuts the incoming Republican majority in Congress has put forward would slash health care, food, and housing by trillions over the next 10 years, resulting in at least a [50% reduction](#) in these services. And they plan to [divert](#) those investments in us into more tax cuts for the nation's very wealthiest.

I want lawmakers of each party to know how important these social investments are for seniors and families. Older Americans — who've worked hard all our lives — shouldn't be pushed out onto the streets, forced to go without sufficient food or health care due to unfortunate circumstances.

We have the tax dollars — the question is whether we have the political will to invest in seniors, workers, and families, or only for tax cuts for the very rich. If we do the latter, that's the real scam.

Freeland resignation in Canada more proof that capitalist policies are failing working people

By Dave McKee

Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's bombshell resignation from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's cabinet on Dec. 16 arrived at an auspicious moment for the federal government—the first weekday after Trudeau's much-vaunted sales tax holiday came into effect. The timing couldn't have been better for big corporations.

Immediately after Freeland posted her resignation letter on social media, the mainstream media situated it within a bigger and sharpening debate over economic policy. Is it better, as Trudeau argues, to give people a break on sales tax during a busy shopping season, or should the government, as Freeland insists, "keep its fiscal powder dry" in the face of an aggressive Trump administration?

This isn't a huge surprise; Bay Street and big capital across Canada have been beating the drums of austerity for months now, so it's far from unexpected that their mouthpieces in government (on both Liberal and Conservative benches) would echo that view.

Clearly, the pressure got to Freeland, and she bolted; she's been connected at the hip to Trudeau for years.

But what's fascinating in the media coverage of this situation, especially since it hinges to a large extent on the sales tax holiday, is the complete absence of what working people really need from the federal government.

Nobody is talking about the still soaring cost of living, or the fact that two million people are still out of work, or that full-time jobs are diminishing and being replaced by part-time employment, or the ongoing and deepening housing crisis.

And there's certainly no talk of why Ottawa—with all-party support in Parliament—plans to jack military spending by more than 100% to \$80 billion in less than a decade, and in the process drain the public coffers of any capacity to protect and expand social programs and infrastructure.

Rather than wringing our hands over a two-month break on sales tax, we should be calling for comprehensive and progressive tax reform to eliminate regressive sales taxes altogether, increase corporate taxes, and shifting the income tax burden onto the wealthy.

This is the real political crisis. This is what workers need to change.

La NEA se opone a la elección de McMahon como secretaria de Educación por parte de Trump

By Mark Gruenberg

WASHINGTON — La Asociación Nacional de Educación, el sindicato más grande del país y con tres millones de miembros, se opone a la elección de Linda McMahon por parte del presidente electo republicano Donald Trump para dirigir el Departamento de Educación, una agencia que Trump y sus legiones quieren eliminar de todos modos.

"Los estudiantes merecen algo mejor que favores políticos", tuiteó la NEA el 17 de diciembre. "Linda McMahon no está calificada para dirigir el Departamento de Educación y carece de la comprensión necesaria para ayudar a las escuelas públicas, donde aprende el 90% de los estudiantes, a prosperar".

La presidenta del sindicato, Becky Pringle, una maestra de ciencias de Filadelfia, etiquetó a McMahon como "Betsy DeVos 2.0", en referencia a la controvertida Secretaria de Educación de Trump en su primer mandato, una gran donante del Partido Republicano que odia las escuelas públicas, sus maestros, sus sindicatos y sus estudiantes, especialmente los estudiantes de color.

McMahon, una ferviente partidaria de Trump y otra multimillonaria en su gabinete de charlatanes, dirigió la World Wrestling Entertainment, fundada por su marido, Vince McMahon. Ambos son grandes donantes republicanos. Trump la nombró para su gabinete de primer mandato como administradora de pequeñas empresas.

La Asociación de Maestros (AFT), el otro gran sindicato de maestros del país, ha adoptado una actitud de esperar y ver qué pasa con la elección de Trump, al tiempo que señala que la política educativa probablemente se forme en la Casa Blanca, no en la oficina del Secretario.

Tanto la AFT como la NEA hicieron campaña contra DeVos, que ganó el puesto cuando el Senado se dividió 50-50 en la nominación de Trump para ella y el vicepresidente republicano Mike Pence desempató.

"Todos los estudiantes, sin importar dónde vivan, cuánto gane su familia o el color de su piel, merecen la oportunidad, los recursos y el apoyo que necesitan para alcanzar su máximo potencial. En todas las comunidades de este país, los padres y los educadores son socios en este esfuerzo", dijo Pringle.

"Durante su primer mandato, Donald Trump nombró a DeVos para socavar y, en última instancia, privatizar las escuelas públicas a través de vales. Ahora, él y Linda McMahon están de vuelta con su propuesta extrema del Proyecto 2025 para eliminar el Departamento de Educación".

El dúo "robaría recursos para nuestros estudiantes más vulnerables, aumentaría el tamaño de las clases, recortaría la capacitación laboral, encarecería la educación superior y la dejaría fuera del alcance de las familias de clase media, eliminaría los servicios de educación especial para estudiantes discapacitados y pondría en riesgo las protecciones de los derechos civiles de los estudiantes".

"Los padres y los educadores se unirán para apoyar a los estudiantes y rechazar las políticas dañinas, extravagantes e insultantes que está impulsando la administración Trump... El Senado debe defender a nuestros estudiantes y rechazar al candidato no calificado de Donald Trump. Nuestros estudiantes y nuestra nación merecen mucho más que Betsy DeVos 2.0".

El tercer sindicato fuertemente involucrado en las escuelas de Estados Unidos, el de Administradores Escolares, aún no ha tomado una posición sobre la nominación de McMahon.

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