

Millions Lose Government Assistance and Protection; Biden Mandates Vaccination

September 15, 2021



This article was written for L'Anticapitaliste, the weekly newspaper of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) of France.

As I write, the American media is filled with remembrances of the September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, some of critical reflection, most in a patriotic vein, yearning for that moment of national unity. This is a fleeting interlude for a country consumed by internal conflicts.

This month millions of Americans lost government unemployment benefits and millions more are losing protection from eviction. The end of temporary federal programs is taking place in a slowly improving economy, still 7.5 million Americans will lose supplemental unemployment benefits of \$300 per month (earlier they were \$600 monthly). Most of those receiving these benefits have already exhausted the typical 26 weeks of state unemployment assistance, though others may be eligible for state benefits. Republicans argue that such benefits have been higher than wages, thus keeping workers from returning to their jobs. Democrats are concentrating on passing trillion-dollar programs that will rebuild the country's infrastructure, tackle climate change, and provide social programs such as child care. So, there is little chance that Congress will pass a new supplemental unemployment benefit law.

At the same time, the U.S. Supreme Court this month stopped President Joseph Biden's administration from continuing its eviction moratorium. Congress has provided \$46.5 billion in funds to assist landlords and tenants, but only about \$5.1 billion has been distributed, largely because of bureaucratic obstacles such as complicated application forms and slow processing. Many tenants remain unaware of the program and how to apply and landlords also resist tenants' attempts to use the system. Some five to ten million households are in arrears and many, having lost jobs during the pandemic, owe thousands of dollars in mortgages or rent. Hundreds demonstrated in Brooklyn against the end of the moratorium, one of them, Fabien Rogers said, "How can they let evictions start when so little money has gotten into people's hands?"

Meanwhile the COVID crisis continues with about 1,500 dying each day, bringing the total deaths to

more than 660,000 Americans. Recent deaths are from the COVID-Delta variant and occur among the unvaccinated, yet 13 percent say they will never get vaccinated. So far in the United States only 69 percent of those eligible have been fully vaccinated, and in some states, it is as low as 40 percent. The unvaccinated are concentrated in rural areas and Republican states in the South and West.

Hoping to end the pandemic and thus to continue to revive the economy, Biden has mandated vaccination for about 100 million workers in both the public and the private sector. Under his plan workers must either be vaccinated or tested weekly. He has the support of Democrats, including progressives, and most corporations—including businesses that supported Trump. Some labor unions support vaccination and masks; others demand the right to negotiate how the mandate is implemented. Unions represent 11 percent of U.S. workers, only 6 percent in the private sector and 35 percent in the public sector, but there is little struggle at the moment; so, their influence on the mandate is limited. Republican governors oppose mandates and have blocked local governments, school districts, and private businesses from imposing them in their states. Schools are reopening, but there is no common policy on vaccination or masks, which are decided by states and local school districts. The essential step now is approving vaccines for 5- to 12-year-olds. There have been some small, sporadic protests at workplaces around the country, generally led by Trump followers, Q-Anon cultists, and anti-vaxxers.

The U.S. Left with few exceptions has surprisingly taken no position on mandates requiring vaccination, testing, and masking. The far left is missing from the nation's most important debate of the moment.