

Trump-Musk budget intervention: Dress rehearsal for presidential dictatorship

Patrick Martin
20 December 2024

President-elect Donald Trump and his billionaire backer Elon Musk, the world's richest man, intervened to torpedo a budget resolution that was set to pass Congress this week and forestall a partial shutdown of the federal government. The action is the latest of a series in which Trump has sought to remove all limits on the political authority he will exercise once he returns to the White House after his inauguration one month from now.

At issue is not the specifics of the “continuing resolution”—a typically rotten compromise between the ultra-right Republicans and their Democratic counterparts—but the very process by which it was enacted, through bipartisan dealmaking in which the two capitalist parties collaborated on a three-month extension in federal funding. Trump and Musk not only object to any role for the Democrats but to the involvement of congressional Republicans as well.

This is shown by Trump's sudden declaration that he wants to add a provision to the resolution that would lift the federal debt ceiling, either temporarily or permanently. On Thursday, House Republicans advanced a proposal that would suspend the federal debt limit for two years, which Trump said he supported.

In past years, measures to raise the debt ceiling have been used by the party out of power to obtain concessions from the party in the White House. Right-wing Republicans have been the main employers of this tactic, most recently in 2023, when Speaker Kevin McCarthy pushed through significant spending cuts in a deal with the Biden administration.

Trump wants to remove this potential check on the actions of his incoming administration, which given the narrow Republican margins of control, 220-215 in the House of Representatives and 53-47 in the Senate,

could become a significant obstacle. Moreover, he wants to create sufficient fiscal room to enable the extension of his multitrillion-dollar tax cut for the wealthy.

Under ordinary circumstances, the 90-day extension of spending authority until March 14, 2025 would be considered highly favorable to the new administration, since all major decisions on non-military budget items would be deferred until then, when the Republicans will have complete control of the White House and Congress. (Significantly, the National Defense Authorization Act, which sets Pentagon priorities, has already passed Congress and been signed into law by President Biden.)

But these are not ordinary times. It is very possible that Trump wants a federal shutdown, perhaps extending until his own inauguration January 20, in order to generate an atmosphere of crisis and dysfunction in Washington and fuel demands for presidential action of an unprecedented character.

This would involve either passage of an American version of the “Enabling Act” that gave Chancellor Adolf Hitler supreme power in Germany in 1933 or the issuance of executive orders once Trump re-enters the White House which would have an equivalent effect.

Since winning the November 5 presidential election, thanks to the political bankruptcy of the Democratic Party and its indifference to the sharp decline in working class living standards over the past four years, Trump has been conducting the transition to his new authoritarian regime on two parallel tracks.

The first is to identify and target any opposition within his own party. His nominees for cabinet and top sub-cabinet positions were chosen from one standpoint only: absolute loyalty and willingness to carry out his orders, regardless of the law or the Constitution. Now

he is putting House Speaker Mike Johnson on notice that he will be removed January 3 when the new House meets if he does not toe the line on the budget resolution.

At the same time, Trump is probing whatever institutional restrictions still remain to unchecked exercise of presidential power. He has suggested that he could order the Senate to adjourn for a period of time so that he can install his nominees through “recess appointments.” He is pushing for a military panel that would review the top brass for “loyalty” (to the president, not the Constitution) and remove those who fail that test.

In undermining Speaker Johnson, Trump is setting the stage for the most extreme faction of fascists, the so-called House Freedom Caucus, to block Johnson’s reelection and open the way to imposing a new speaker more directly subordinate to Trump. Some House and Senate Republicans have already suggested that Musk could fill the bill, since the speaker is not required to be a member of the House, only elected by it. The oligarch has not rejected the suggestion.

Trump has declared that he will act as a “dictator on day one,” issuing a flurry of executive orders, including a blanket pardon for the fascist thugs who attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, and mass round-ups of undocumented immigrants, with millions targeted for arrest, detention in concentration camps and expulsion from the country. For the latter action, he plans to deploy the US Army, even though the use of the military for civil law enforcement is prohibited under the Posse Comitatus Act.

Whatever the ebb and flow of events over the next few days and weeks, one thing is certain: As Trump and his acolytes move to assert dictatorial power, his nominal opponents in the Biden administration and the Democratic Party will do nothing.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre could only bemoan the effective Trump veto of the budget resolution. “A deal is a deal,” she wailed. “Republicans should keep their word.” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he would wait for the House to pass a continuing resolution, adding, “We have a deal with Republicans, and we’re sticking with it.” House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said, “House Republicans will now own any harm that is visited upon the American people that results from a

government shutdown, or worse.”

The Democrats are concerned only that they push through as much funding as possible for continuing the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza, as well as building up for a wider war in the Middle East against Iran.

Patrick Martin was interviewed about the US political crisis on the “Law and Disorder” podcast. The interview will be broadcast in New York City on WBAI at 11:00 a.m., Monday, December 23, on 99.5 FM and on 150 other radio stations nationwide. It will also be available at lawanddisorder.org



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact