

Democrats and Republicans Pass Budget to Prepare US for War

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The bipartisan budget bill passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump Friday morning marks a new stage in the American ruling class' drive for social counterrevolution and world military domination.

The deal, which reached Trump's desk only because of support from congressional Democrats, expresses the oligarchic character of American society. Behind the factional mudslinging and mutual recrimination between Democrats, Republicans and Trump, it is the corporations and the military-intelligence agencies that dictate government policy. All sections of the financial aristocracy agree: the desperate social needs of working people must be subordinated to private profit and the preparation of the American military machine for a major war.

The budget agreement provides the military with \$1.4 trillion over the course of the next two years, a 13 percent increase from 2017 and 7 percent more than what the White House requested. The size of the year-to-year increase alone—\$80 billion—is larger than the combined annual military spending of every other country in the world except China.

An additional \$71 billion is earmarked for “overseas contingency operations,” i.e., ongoing wars, indicating plans to continue indefinitely the 17-year-old war in Afghanistan and escalate the war in Syria, where US air and artillery strikes killed over 100 Syrian government-backed forces on Wednesday.

In preparation for the possibility that increased US military operations abroad may lead to conflict with a nuclear-armed power such as Russia or China, the budget provides the military with the resources necessary to replace its entire nuclear arsenal. It puts an end to limits placed on military spending in 2013 as part of a bipartisan agreement to cap domestic social spending, paving the way for even more astronomical increases in funding for the Pentagon.

The role of the Democrats in passing this deal exposes the right-wing character of their opposition to Trump. It was the Democrats who ensured that there would be sufficient votes to pass the bill in both houses of Congress after a faction of Republican deficit hawks in the House of Representatives announced its opposition. In the Senate, the Democrats voted four-to-one for the bill, providing more “yes” votes and fewer “no” votes than the Republicans. In the House, 73 Democrats voted for the agreement. Without their votes, the bill would have fallen short by a wide margin.

After the Democrats saved the budget bill, Trump signed it, tweeting,

“Just signed Bill. Our Military will now be stronger than ever before. We love and need our Military and gave them everything.”

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer echoed Trump in praising the deal, saying it

“gives our fighting forces the resources they need to keep our country safe.”

In an effort to lend the war budget a democratic veneer, Schumer claimed that it increases social spending. In reality, the bulk of the non-military spending comes from the limited expansion of several programs that already exist, such as the Community Healthcare Center (CHC) system and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Prior to this budget, 54 percent of federal discretionary spending, i.e., excluding entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security, went to the military. Now this figure will increase to 59 percent.

Little of the new spending will reach people in need. For example, a paltry \$2 billion is being made available to fix the electrical grid in Puerto Rico, where one third of the population remains without power more than four months after Hurricane Maria. In contrast, the bill provides \$2.3 billion in recovery funds to the Florida citrus industry. Puerto Rico has estimated that fixing its grid would cost \$17 billion.

Six billion dollars is allocated for the opioid crisis, a major factor in the ongoing decline in US life expectancy. This is far less than the \$45 billion proposed in the 2017 congressional health care debate, which leading advocates called “woefully, woefully short.”

Much of the \$6 billion will go to arming the police and prosecuting users. An unnamed White House official told CNN on Thursday that opioid spending “is a law enforcement issue.” On Thursday, Attorney General Jeff Sessions placed the blame for the opioid crisis, which killed 63,000 people in 2016, on its victims.

“I mean, people need to take some aspirin sometimes,” Sessions said. “Tough it out.”

The budget deal provides a mere \$20 billion for infrastructure spending. According to the Federal Highway Administration, \$328 billion is required just to fix crumbling bridges in the US.

Coming on top of the multi-trillion-dollar tax cut for the rich passed in December, which the Democrats never seriously opposed, the massive increase in military spending will increase the federal budget deficit to \$1 trillion or more for years to come. The drive to use the resulting increase in the US debt as justification for dismantling the core social programs from the 1930s and 1960s—Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—has already begun.

At his weekly press conference, Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan reiterated his pledge to wage war on these entitlement programs. “The military is not the reason we’ve got fiscal problems. It is entitlements,” he declared.

After signing the budget bill on Friday, Trump said the social spending in the agreement was

“waste.” He added that

“costs on non-military lines will never come down if we do not elect more Republicans in the 2018 election and beyond.”

Perhaps the most cynical point in the political theater surrounding the bill’s passage was the eight-hour speech Wednesday by Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who read the stories of young undocumented immigrants who were brought to the US when they were children and have legal status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The bill includes no protection for the 800,000 DACA beneficiaries who face possible deportation beginning March 5, when the DACA program expires.

Pelosi’s stunt, which followed the announcement of a bipartisan budget agreement in the Senate, was an elaborate attempt to provide political cover for the Democratic Party, which had already agreed behind the scenes to provide the votes needed to pass the measure in the House. In typical fashion, a number of Democrats were allowed to cast meaningless “no” votes to preserve their “progressive” bona fides for future elections.

The Democrats have only disdain for those who sought to pressure them to the left. Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown said of constituents who appealed to him to vote against the budget deal,

“If the suggestion is if I’m spooked by them or they affect my voting record, the answer is of course not.”

The passage of the budget bill shows the social character and political role of the Democratic Party. It is as much a pro-war, pro-corporate party as its Republican counterpart. It shares the Trump administration’s goals of increasing “border security,” reducing taxes on the wealthy, boosting corporate profits and preparing the military for total war—with its domestic component of internal repression.

The Democratic Party’s main differences with Trump are of a right-wing character, aimed primarily at forcing Trump to adopt a more bellicose policy against Russia in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The Democratic Party-inspired hysteria against “Russian interference,” including the bogus Mueller investigation into Trump collusion with the Russians, is a central element in this drive. It is accompanied by the reactionary campaign against “fake news” on social media, aimed at creating the framework for Internet censorship and an escalating attack on free speech.

In the working class, there is broad opposition of an entirely different character, based on anger over poverty, social inequality, police violence, poisoned water, student debt, health care costs and fear of deportation. This tremendous potential social power must be awakened and given an independent, socialist direction. It is only on this basis that the catastrophic war plans of US imperialism can be stopped.

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