Incoming Trump administration prepares assault on federal workers

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The incoming Trump administration has singled out civilian federal employees for attacks on jobs, employment security and pensions. According to the *Washington Post*, "President-elect Donald Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress are drawing up plans to take on the government bureaucracy they have long railed against, by eroding job protections and grinding down benefits that federal workers have received for a generation."

The federal civil service, which consists of over 2.75 million workers, excluding members of the armed forces, the judiciary and elected officials, has come under relentless attack from the political right for decades. Right-wing propaganda depicts federal workers as overpaid and privileged drones in an attempt to divide the working class and divert anger over declining living standards and growing inequality against a section of the working class itself. The aim is to dismantle whatever remains of job protections and benefits that are based on civil service laws and contracts with federal employee unions. This is despite the best efforts of the unions over many years to help impose job cuts and wage and benefit concessions.

In 2012, House Republicans proposed a 10 percent federal workforce reduction as part of their fiscal budget for that year.

According to the *Post*, the incoming administration will implement "[h]iring freezes, an end to automatic raises, a green light to fire poor performers, a ban on union business on the government's dime and less generous pensions." In addition, the Trump White House will seek "guidance" from the Republican governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, who in 2011 provoked mass protests at the state capital by shredding public employee rights and imposing sweeping concessions on public workers.

The new administration will also follow the example of Vice President-elect Mike Pence, who, as governor of Indiana, tied state worker pay to performance ratings.

According to Jason Chaffetz, Republican congressman from Utah and chairman of the House Committee on Government Oversight and Reform, the plan to slash federal employee pensions will be modeled on his home state, which recently replaced defined benefit pensions with market-based defined contribution plans such as 401(k)s. The switch from traditional pensions will initially affect newly hired workers, according to press reports.

The assault on federal workers is based on the ten-point "Contract with the American Voter" released by Donald Trump in late October. The statement declared that within its first 100 days in office, the Trump administration would enact "a hiring freeze on all federal employees to reduce the federal workforce through attrition (exempting military, public safety, and public health)."

The *Post* quotes former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a member of Trump's transition team, as saying that Stephen Bannon, Trump's chief White House strategist, will lead the attack on federal workers. Until signing on as the head of Trump's presidential campaign last August, Bannon headed the Breitbart News web site, a platform for the fascistic alt-right that regularly rails against the so-called "privileged class" of government workers in Washington.

Contrary to the myth of a ballooning "big government" promoted by the right wing, the US civil service has undergone numerous cutbacks in its workforce under both Republican and Democratic presidents. As a result, the number of federal

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employees today is consistent with the number employed in the 1960s, despite a near-doubling of the US population since then.

A likely precedent for Trump's plan to slash workers' pay and job protections is the 2014 Veterans' Choice Act, signed into law by President Obama. Passed during the scandal at the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) that year, the law facilitates the firing of VA workers while giving employees less than a week to appeal their dismissal.

Prior to the Veterans' Choice Act, workers had the option of appealing their dismissal to the Merit Systems Protection Board, established as part of the civil service system to prevent politically motivated firings.

Under a Trump administration, such firings are likely to become the rule. During the presidential campaign, Trump regularly declared that if elected he would shut down government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Education. At the same time, Trump is pledging a massive increase in military spending and packing his administration-in-waiting with military figures.

The planned assault on federal workers exposes the cynicism behind repeated statements by Democratic Party leaders—from Obama and incoming Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren—suggesting that Trump may enact measures to improve the lot of workers and pledging their readiness to collaborate with him.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest federal employee union, has remained silent on Trump's agenda. On November 9, the day after the election, AFGE President J. David Cox Sr. released a brief press statement declaring, "We ?will work with the Trump administration on areas of common ground, as we have with every administration for generations."

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