

“We need to get the masses to realize what’s happening”: Federal workers protest jobs massacre by Trump and Elon Musk

Our reporters

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The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online meeting this Sunday at 3 p.m. Eastern/12 noon Pacific, “Mobilize the working class to save the US Postal Service and other federal programs!” Register for the meeting here.

Speak out against the attack on federal services by filling out the form below! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Thousands of federal government workers rallied in dozens of cities around the country this week, in opposition to the Trump administration’s wrecking operation against the federal workforce. The demonstrations are an indication of the opposition that exists to mass job cuts and dictatorship, meanwhile, they reveal some of the political problems that must be overcome, especially the attempt to channel opposition behind the Democratic Party.

Over the past month, more than 14,000 federal workers have been fired, including many newer workers who had been hired over the past year or two. In addition, an estimated 75,000 have been coerced into resigning or retiring early, and entire agencies, including USAID and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, have been dismantled.

For Trump and his co-conspirator Elon Musk, this is just the beginning. The basis for implementing mass layoffs on an unprecedented scale was laid last week in an executive order calling for “large scale reductions in force.”

In carrying out these attacks, the Trump administration is repudiating the Constitution and its imposition of a system of checks and balances on the chief executive’s power. “He who saves his Country does not violate any Law,” Trump declared on Truth Social last weekend, underscoring that his administration will not be constrained by the courts or Congress, to the extent they offer any resistance.

These attacks prompted thousands of federal workers and supporters to turn out at protests around the country on Tuesday and Wednesday.

New York City

WSWS reporters spoke to protesters in New York City Wednesday evening.

A probationary employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who was fired by Trump and Musk, and asked to remain anonymous out of fear of retribution, said, “I just lost my job. I was working as a civil tech worker in Veterans Affairs. I work to make sure that tech is accessible for all veterans who deserve their benefits. I specifically work on understanding the human—the veteran—problems, and then I design tech for that, as opposed to making humans adjust to our tech, which is what

Big Tech does.

“We understood that there were going to be wide, sweeping cuts across the government but we really didn’t think it was going to be Veterans Affairs, and especially we didn’t think it was going to be tech workers because we are already really stretched thin. From our high, high leadership, there was no heads up. Our leadership actually found out after us. They didn’t get a list of who had been fired until 16 hours after the fact. I got an email around 7:15 at night February 13th.

“I was shocked and so were all of my colleagues. I talked to my leadership, and they said that they were not consulted at all. We can’t figure out what the data points were. It was not done by performance. It was not done by ranking, like first in, first out. I mean, we were all probationary, meaning in our first year, but that is the only commonality; it was across the board, all the designers, engineers, product people in our office.”

The impact of the firings will be significant. “The most vulnerable are going to be hit first. Those people who don’t have access to computers or who are blind, who have low incomes, they’re going to feel it first, but it’s going to keep going. I mean, of course, our trans veterans, our gay veterans, people in rural areas. They’re already trying to take away features on the website that made things more available to all people.”

“I think it’s a complete takeover of all of our systems,” she said. “All of our tech, all of our data, all of our security. I think it absolutely has to be stopped now or we lose our opportunity. Either we get Congress to fight back, and we support our civic tech workers to just make it stop, or we get the masses to realize what’s happening. Right now.

“If they take over all of our tech, there’s no turning back from this, they will have full control of everything. We want humanity to still control the tech and not tech to control us. We don’t want tech bros running the country. Listen to your civic tech people. We’re trying to save it.”

Danilo, a PHD neuroscience researcher at New York University, explained he was protesting because public funding for research is under assault. “I feel like what we have to do currently is resist any sort of attempt to succumb to the demands of a fascist movement that wants to demobilize the gains that we’ve made as a society.

“They want to widen the inequalities that we experience on a day-to-day basis, and we have to resist and continue the good fight that we are waging so far,” he said. “We have no other option. The oligarchy is well united. They are already waging war. They’re winning. The question is to what extent are we willing to organize to actively combat this war and make gains.”

Nicole, a Columbia University graduate worker told the WSWS, “I am studying bio-statistics, so my work is in public health. I used to teach a DEI program for undergraduate but that will probably be cut. I am here because people need to show up and help each other. It seems like none of

the politicians are helping so we need to unite workers. I agree with this idea of rank-and-file committees to unite workers."

Chicago

At a demonstration in Chicago on Tuesday, an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) worker told the WSWS, "The attacks on the EPA are going to result in catastrophes on the health of American citizens. Previously, before the EPA existed, there were crises that resulted in deaths from major incidents of pollution. After the EPA was installed, that stopped, and we would be looking at all that happening again.

"When a disaster strikes, there wouldn't be a contingency plan if there is no EPA. It wouldn't happen overnight, but if you get rid of these environmental regulations, there will be rapid deterioration" of the environment.

"This is coming from billionaire oligarchs, the tech industry in general, the Heritage Foundation. It's the total destruction of the US government, tearing it down and starting something completely different, from scratch—if anything at all—in order to meet their needs. They want no regulatory oversight of their companies.

"We shouldn't be following the orders of unelected minions that have infiltrated the government. They should not be the boss of us. All their actions are illegal. They should be ignored. Whatever they're doing has no merit.

"It would be great if we could all band together as much as possible. It is currently illegal for federal workers to go on strike, but if there were a movement, then sure."

Washington, D.C.

Several rallies were held Wednesday in Washington, D.C., where approximately 20 percent of the federal workforce is centered. At noon, a crowd of several hundred mostly-federal workers gathered outside of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on Capitol Hill to protest the mass firings carried out the previous week and the Trump administration's freeze on federal spending. Another protest was held in the evening outside Elon Musk's SpaceX offices downtown.

In addition to federal workers, the events attracted workers from the private sector and the community, in opposition to the destruction of public health and social programs. Many were particularly opposed to the selection of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine fanatic and conspiracy theorist, to lead HHS. Numerous protesters from both the government and the private sector expressed feelings of being "scared" of things which Kennedy might attempt from within HHS.

Many workers also highlighted the illegal character of the mass firing of probationary workers, which by law must be tied to poor performance or conduct. Workers explained that they had received generic notices on Saturday, some which failed to even note their position or department, informing them that they were being terminated for "performance" while providing no further details.

One worker who had been eliminated from her position at NIH said she had received near-spotless performance reviews up until the day she was fired. Upon receiving the notice she sought to obtain an exit interview in order to see the reason her superiors had for the firing, but was frozen out of the agency's email system.

A WSWS reporter spoke with Remy, who had joined the HHS protest in

Washington, D.C. in solidarity. "I'm a nurse. I'm also a person with multiple disabilities," she said. "I wear this mask all the time to keep myself safe and to keep other people around me safe. We are starting year five of a global pandemic that is still ongoing and now emerging into possibly a new pandemic with the bird flu situation.

"We need to be bolstering our health services, bolstering our public safety services, our public health services, not removing them," she said. "Everything that's happening right now is not being done through any legal channels," she said, referring to Elon Musk's "Department of Government Efficiency."

A non-profit worker attending the rally Wednesday declared "We're seeing Elon Musk, President Trump, the Trump administration, even Congress turning their back to the things that keep our country healthy, the research that keeps us going and progressing in science funding... I'm not gonna stand here and let it happen without a fight."

She noted that claims that cuts would induce efficiency were wrong. "All it's doing is stopping us from making progress... We in fact need more spending in order to invest in programs that allow us to do our work the best. So this idea that just by slashing the budgets we're going to get somewhere, the only place we're going to go is straight to the bottom."

The rallies in Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York and elsewhere were organized by a loose organization of federal unions, including the American Federation of Government Employees and the National Treasury Employees Union, among others. The basic orientation to the Democratic Party was displayed prominently in the rallies, in particular by elevating the "progressive" or "democratic socialist" wing of the party under conditions where the party as a whole is characterized by abject prostration to Trump. In New York City, the rally included a lineup of Democratic Socialists of America-affiliated Democrats, including US representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as the featured speaker.

In her remarks, Ocasio-Cortez offered up platitudes about "not giving up this country without a fight." She focused much of her rhetoric on the role of Elon Musk, while covering for the policies of the Democratic Party that have paved the way for the return of Trump.

At one point in her remarks, Ocasio-Cortez told the audience, "I want you all to know that we have a plan," without any elaboration of the supposed plan. After a month of utter fecklessness from the Democratic Party, it is clear their plans include avoiding at all costs encouraging opposition from below. The fact is that the Democratic Party is just as much a party of the oligarchy as the Republicans.

At the Washington, D.C. rally, a similar attempt was made to funnel opposition into the Democratic Party. Maryland Democratic representative Jamie Raskin attributed the attacks on federal workers to "stupid and cruel" characteristics of Musk and Trump personally, rather than part of a class policy defending the interests of the oligarchy. Raskin went on to assert that Trump was also "stupid and cruel" for "selling out democratic allies in Europe" and "selling out the people of Ukraine to Putin," i.e., not prioritizing and expanding funds toward military confrontation with Russia, the primary focus of Biden's prior administration.

The attempts by the unions to contain opposition to dictatorship and job cuts within the confines of Democratic Party politics, and thereby sabotaging the struggle before it has begun, must be countered by the development of independent rank-and-file committees to catalyze a movement of the working class.



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