

Trump signs executive order ending many federal union contracts, bureaucracy responds: “Call Congress”

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In a massive attack on workers’ rights, President Donald Trump signed an executive order late Thursday evening to abolish previously negotiated federal union contracts under the pretext of defending “the national security of the United States.”

The executive order terminating the union rights of federal employees is part of Trump’s ongoing attempts to consolidate a presidential dictatorship and eviscerate democratic rights.

The EO, titled “Exclusions from Federal Labor-Management Relations Programs” exempts 18 government departments and agency subdivisions from previously negotiated union contracts by reclassifying them as vital to “national security.” In a “Fact Sheet” released alongside the order, the Trump administration claimed the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) granted Trump the ability to end collective bargaining for departments and agencies that have “national security missions.”

The departments and agencies named in the order include the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); the Department of Energy (ED); the Department of Treasury; the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); the National Science Foundation; the Federal Communications Commission (FCC); subdivisions of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Agriculture, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); the Food and Drug Administration (FDA); the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); the National Institutes of Health (NIH); and the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Administration for Children and Families.

The Trump administration claimed that the HHS needed to be under this guideline on the grounds that “COVID-19 and the recent bird flu have demonstrated how foreign pandemics affect national security.” This is the height of hypocrisy, given the fact that Trump is systematically

dismantling critical federal public health programs which will make the country far more vulnerable to future pandemics.

Making clear that the aim of these orders is to impose a loyalty test to the president as a condition of federal employment, the “fact sheet” declared “Certain Federal unions have declared war on President Trump’s agenda.” It noted that unions have filed lawsuits and grievances in response to Trump’s attempts to purge the federal workforce and that “Trump refuses to let union obstruction interfere with his efforts to protect Americans and our national interests.”

In a memorandum issued by the Office of Personnel Management accompanying the executive order, the OPM directs agencies covered under the order to use “Chapter 75 for Performance-Based Removals,” a reference to Chapter 75 of Title 5, United States Code. Chapter 75 authorizes the firing of workers when “necessary or advisable in the interests of national security. The determination of the head of the agency is final.”

No doubt, any workers who express any hesitation or disagreement with carrying out Trump’s fascist agenda—from genocide, to disappearing immigrants, to destroying workers’ rights to collectively organize—will be separated from the government under the guise of “national security.”

Portending further massive layoffs, the same OPM memo notes that Trump previously declared “large-scale reductions in force (RIFs)” in many agencies. With the termination of collective bargaining agreements, the memo instructs agencies and subdivisions to “conduct RIFs consistent with applicable statutory and regulatory requirements...”

In response to this brazen attack on workers, the heads of some of the largest trade unions in the US, including Liz Schuler of the AFL-CIO, Lee Saunders of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

(AFSCME), and Everett Kelley of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), held a joint press conference with Democratic House members in Washington where they offered no concrete strategy to fight back.

Instead, the well-paid and well-dressed union bureaucrats and capitalist politicians mouthed empty platitudes and sowed illusions in the court system and Democratic Party. Joining the bureaucrats were Democratic Representatives Jamie Raskin (Maryland), Steny Hoyer (Maryland) and Don Beyer (Virginia).

Raskin, Hoyer and Beyer were among the majority of Democrats who voted to block railroad workers from striking in November 2022.

In his remarks, Kelley, president of AFGE, tried to reason with Trump by pointing to the pivotal role the nationalist trade unions have played in suppressing opposition to imperialist war.

“AFGE has been around for over 90 years,” he said. “Federal employees, many veterans themselves, have safeguarded America’s security for decades and we have done it with a union contract.”

He noted that “union work was not a security issue during the Cold War, during Desert Storm, during the War on Terror and during the Trump first term...”

Kelley, speaking the language of Musk and Trump, said that union contracts “have consistently led to higher morale, better efficiency and stronger public service. Stripping these rights will harm government effectiveness...”

While he never mentioned the word “strike,” Kelley pointed to the Democratic representatives by his side and declared, “We will fight. We will fight in courtrooms. We will fight in Congress.” Sowing more illusions in the Democratic Party, Kelley said again, “the Congress will fight for us.”

But far from “fighting,” the Democrats have rolled over on Trump’s attacks on the Constitution and democratic rights. Earlier this month, Senate Democrats led by Chuck Schumer (New York) provided the necessary votes to advance Trump’s spending bill and avert a government shutdown. The bill, characterized by the WSWS as a modern-day version of Hitler’s Enabling Act, codifies the thousands of job cuts initiated by the Trump administration and increases military spending, while cutting billions from vital social programs used by workers.

Democrats have also co-signed Trump’s attacks on immigrant workers, with Senator Bernie Sanders himself praising Trump’s immigration policies as legal residents and student visa holders are disappeared.

In her remarks, AFL-CIO head Schuler praised her fellow bureaucrats and politicians, stating that the “leaders standing before you” will “fight back” and “stand together.” Lee Saunders, president of AFCSME, likewise offered empty banalities. “We are going to use our voice,” he said, multiple times.

Neither Schuler, Saunders nor Kelley once raised the possibility of workers striking not only to save their jobs, but to stand for the rights of workers everywhere to negotiate their working conditions collectively. They were similarly silent on the attacks on immigrants and legal residents.

This is not a mistake. None of the union heads ascended to their positions because of militancy in leading class struggles, but because of their willingness to work with capitalist politicians and corporations in suffocating workers’ struggles to the benefit of Wall Street and the government.

In social media posts Friday, AFGE implored its dues-paying members to “[g]rab your personal phone during your non-duty time and tell Congress to stop Trump’s attempt to outlaw federal unions.”

This dead-end strategy underscores that if workers are going to fight for their jobs and democratic rights, they must do so through a rebellion against the trade union bureaucracy, which has paved the way for these latest attacks and the return of Trump by betraying previous struggles.

Workers need their own political strategy, independent of the union apparatus, the Democrats and their pseudo-left supporters. The fight to protect federal jobs requires workers linking together across industries and national boundaries to take on their shared class enemy.

In the United States, the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is taking up this struggle to link postal workers with workers in every city and neighborhood against the budding dictatorship. Workers interested in joining or creating their own Rank-and-File Committee should fill out the form below.



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