

Carney government expands assault on public services as thousands of workers hit with layoff notices, including at Health Canada

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Some 10,000 Canadian federal public service workers were warned in letters over the past week that their jobs could soon be cut. The vicious cost-cutting onslaught is a central component of the federal Liberal government's drive to raise tens of billions of dollars for Canada's war machine and the enrichment of its financial oligarchy.

The targeted employees include workers at: Health Canada; Global Affairs Canada; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; Transport Canada; Employment and Social Development; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; Agriculture Canada; Statistics Canada; Shared Services Canada; the Treasury Board Secretariat and Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Prime Minister Mark Carney aims to "save" \$60 billion through the axing of 28,000 federal positions over the next four years and other cuts to "discretionary spending." At the same time, his government is funneling vastly more into rearmament, committing \$80 billion in additional funding for the Canadian military and the expansion of Canada's military-industrial base just in last fall's budget.

At Health Canada alone, unions report well over 1,900 employees have now been warned their jobs are on the chopping block, with the formal issuing of "work adjustment notices." This includes 895 Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) members, over 700 members of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC) and 331 in the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE).

Across all federal agencies and departments, PSAC reported that more than 5,000 of its members received "work adjustment notices" last week. Around 2,550 members of CAPE and 2,700 PIPSC were similarly notified that their positions are being eliminated.

The scope and character of the cuts make clear they will undermine essential systems relied on by millions. Health Canada employees oversee drug approvals and safety monitoring, food and consumer product regulation and public health risk management. Agriculture Canada workers play a central role in food system oversight and federal responses to disease outbreaks.

As PIPSC warned, "deep workforce cuts at Health Canada will weaken the systems Canadians rely on." The workers being targeted are the specialists who ensure medicines are safe, food does not make individuals sick and dangerous products are pulled from shelves. Even by the government's own numbers, Health Canada's workforce has already been driven down through attrition. Treasury Board figures showed 9,628 employees in March 2025, down from 10,118 in 2024.

These cuts are all the more reckless because they are being imposed in the midst of an ongoing public health crisis triggered by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. With mitigation measures and vaccination campaigns long dispensed with by government officials so as to placate the far-right, COVID continues to circulate. Meanwhile, a virulent strain of influenza is surging and measles has made a sharp resurgence, with Canada losing its long-held measles "elimination" status.

The sustained assault on public health is not a uniquely Canadian phenomenon, but part of an international offensive driven by ruling elites that have treated mass infection, chronic illness and premature death as acceptable "trade-offs" in the defence of profit. The Trump administration's rampage against science—personified in the political elevation of anti-vaccine and anti-public health forces around health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.—has emboldened a broader push to destroy health services on which millions rely.

The layoffs sweeping through the federal public service are the result of the Liberals' "Canada Strong" budget passed last year—an openly right-wing program of class war and military rearmament that was implemented through the complicity of all the parties in parliament. Its passage depended on the calculated intervention of the New Democratic Party (NDP), backed by its sponsors in the trade union bureaucracy, along with the Greens, all of whom ensured that Carney's minority government survived and that the austerity drive could be accelerated and intensified without interruption.

While posturing as opponents of the federal cuts, NDP MPs used abstentions and parliamentary manoeuvres to keep Carney in office and the budget intact, thereby authorizing the job

destruction now spreading through the federal public service.

Since 2019, the NDP has propped up successive Liberal governments that have massively hiked military spending, waged war against Russia, supported the Israeli genocide in Gaza and imposed austerity and inflation-driven real wage cuts. One of the Liberal government's most significant initiatives has been the virtual outlawing of the right to strike, using a concocted redefinition of an obscure clause in the Canada Labour Code to ban strikes by ministerial order without so much as a parliamentary vote. None of this got in the way of the NDP and unions continuing their collaboration with the Liberals.

Even as the budget's job cuts were being unveiled, the Canadian Labour Congress urged the NDP not to bring down the government, but to collaborate in "improving" the budget—an explicit pledge to keep workers chained to the very political framework responsible for the assault.

PSAC's response was of the same character: mild criticism and immediate accommodation, coupled with a refusal to mobilize the membership in any fight to stop layoffs. The bureaucracy's objective is not to defend workers but to manage their opposition, keeping it within a collective bargaining system rigged in favour of the employer and enforced by the courts, labour boards and the coercive apparatus of the capitalist state.

In response to last week's "work adjustment notices," PSAC bleated in a pre-release: "PSAC will continue to support affected members and push back against cuts that threaten both jobs and the services people depend on. The union has developed workforce adjustment resources to help members navigate this difficult process, including FAQs, a member guide, a flow chart, and an informational video." In other words, workers will be left to fend for themselves, with no proposal for any kind of collective action, such as strikes or even protest demonstrations, coming from the bureaucracy.

The PSAC bureaucracy's hostility to any working class resistance is rooted in the class interests of the corporatist union apparatus. The PSAC leadership—as with the union bureaucracy as a whole, from the Canadian Labour Congress on down—has intimate ties with the state and big business, from which the privileged, middle-class union bureaucrats profit handsomely. They support the job cuts and other austerity measures, as well as the rearmament program and all of Canadian imperialism's wars around the world, because they benefit from the stepped-up exploitation of workers at home and Canadian imperialist plunder abroad.

Federal workers have already lived through the consequences of the Liberal–NDP–union alliance. The layoffs now underway were prepared by the betrayal of the 2023 federal strike, when more than 100,000 PSAC members walked out against the Trudeau government's wage suppression and an inflation-driven collapse in living standards. That strike indicated the immense power of the working class, but it also exposed the

decisive role of the union apparatus in preventing workers from using that power. PSAC kept workers isolated, suppressed rank-and-file initiative and blocked any expansion of the fight to broader sections of workers facing similar attacks. After staging controlled pickets and keeping negotiations shrouded in secrecy, the union abruptly shut down the strike and ordered workers back to work on the basis of a tentative agreement that entrenched real wage cuts and left fundamental issues, including remote work protections, unresolved.

PSAC's sellout was a major factor facilitating the Liberal government's ever more aggressive attacks on workers, including the systematic banning of strikes using Section 107 of the Labour Code from the summer of 2024 onwards. PSAC and the trade unions as a whole, public and private sector alike, have blocked any action by the working class against the shredding of the right to strike under conditions where all sections of the ruling class have responded to the second Trump administration by stampeding to the right and adopting vast swathes of Trump's anti-worker social program.

The assault on federal public service workers parallels the Carney government's restructuring of Canada Post. CEO Doug Ettinger has said the Crown Corporation aims to eliminate some 30,000 jobs over the next decade. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers is collaborating in management's attacks by isolating worker opposition and attempting to ram through rotten tentative agreements reached behind the backs of the rank and file.

Federal workers must draw the essential conclusion: the fight against layoffs and the defence of quality public services requires a unified industrial and political struggle against the Carney government and its backers in the union bureaucracy and NDP. Workers can succeed only through a conscious political break with the nationalist, pro-capitalist politics advanced by the NDP and the unions and by breaking out of the anti-worker, capitalist state-regulated "collective bargaining" system that the union bureaucracy upholds.

What is required is an entirely new strategy, one based on the unification of the working class across Canada and internationally in an industrial and political counter-offensive for decent-paying, secure jobs, an end to austerity, no more money for militarism and war, and the defence of all democratic rights, including the right to strike. This fight is possible only on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program and requires the construction of rank-and-file committees so workers can seize control of their struggle from the hands of the union bureaucracy.



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