

Trump's plan to purge the federal government and the threat of dictatorship

Jacob Crosse
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On Thursday, the Trump administration's Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced a new rule that will strip tens of thousands of federal workers of job protections and due process rights and reclassify them as "at-will" employees, subject to termination by the president for any reason. This reclassification is a component part of the Trump administration's erection of a presidential dictatorship.

The rule subverts the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883, which established the U.S. Civil Service Commission and required that federal jobs be filled based on merit and competitive examinations rather than political loyalty. Before the act, the federal government operated under a spoils system, in which incoming administrations routinely fired large sections of the workforce and replaced them with loyalists.

Major newspapers have reported that the rule could affect up to 50,000 federal workers but nothing in the rule itself limits the figure.

The scale of this purge surpasses even Ronald Reagan's mass firing of striking air traffic controllers during the 1981 PATCO strike. Of the roughly 13,000 controllers who walked off the job, Reagan fired 11,300. In just the first year of Trump's second term, more than 24,000 federal employees have already been involuntarily terminated through reductions in force (RIF) and the firing of probationary workers, while the new OPM rule paves the way for tens of thousands more to be fired at will.

This latest attack is part of a sweeping offensive by the Trump administration against federal workers and the working class as a whole. Since returning to the White House, Trump has overseen the departure of more than 300,000 federal workers through a combination of involuntary terminations, voluntary buyouts, early retirements and attrition.

In addition, last year the administration stripped 370,000 federal workers at the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of collective bargaining rights.

The assault on federal workers is part of a wider rampage against the working class. In January 2026, US companies announced more than 108,000 layoffs—the highest total for the start of a year since the Great Recession. Over the course of 2025, more than 1.2 million layoffs were announced, the highest level since the pandemic year of 2020.

Even more significantly, however, the rule is part of the ongoing consolidation of power in the hands of the executive branch. It is a key plank in the Trump administration's drive to eliminate all institutional checks on presidential authority and erect an unaccountable dictatorship.

Simply put, the rule allows the executive to fire federal workers without appeal if they are deemed insufficiently compliant with presidential directives—while redefining such compliance as a measure of the "democratic process." This turns the meaning of democracy on its head. The Constitution vests lawmaking authority in Congress and assigns the executive the role of enforcing those laws. By contrast, the new rule treats resistance to presidential orders as resistance to democracy itself, placing loyalty to the president above loyalty to the Constitution.

The rule permits the mass firing of civil servants for interpreting statutes differently than the White House, delaying implementation pending legal review, or refusing to carry out directives they believe are illegal. Its vague and elastic criteria mirror the language of Trump's October 2020 executive order creating Schedule F, which defined covered positions as those of a "confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character." That order was issued just months before the January 6 coup attempt, when Trump loyalists stormed the Capitol to prevent certification of the election.

Five and a half years later, the program is being revived and expanded. Trump's power to summarily fire civil servants—at the EPA, Department of Labor, NLRB and elsewhere—can now be used against those who previously voiced opposition to his agenda or who fail to demonstrate sufficient loyalty. These measures amount to a political purge aimed at transforming the entire state into a

mechanism of personal rule directed from the White House.

The significance of these actions arises from their broader context. The Trump administration is openly conspiring to rig or cancel the upcoming 2026 midterm elections. Trump has threatened to “nationalize” the elections, and his former chief strategist Steve Bannon has threatened to deploy ICE agents outside polling places. In recent days, he has denounced Detroit, Philadelphia and Atlanta as “corrupt” and declared in an NBC interview that he would only accept election results if they are “honest.”

ICE itself is being transformed into a paramilitary force operating under the direct control of the executive branch. As *The Economist* recently noted, ICE is “ideally placed to sidestep protections” designed to limit presidential authority, describing the agency as Trump’s “own paramilitary militia.” It warned that ICE can be deployed “pretty much anywhere with impunity, including during elections,” and that protests can be deliberately provoked to justify escalated repression. “A theme of Mr Trump’s second term,” the *Economist* notes, has been the accumulation of presidential power.”

As Trump moves to consolidate dictatorial power, the Democratic Party is doing everything it can to suppress opposition and keep the government functioning. Amid national outrage over the ICE/CBP killings of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, congressional Democrats supplied the critical votes this week to keep the government open and ensure uninterrupted funding for ICE and CBP. Their proposed “guardrails” for funding ICE, such as body cameras and use-of-force guidelines, are cosmetic measures that do nothing to halt repression or prevent dictatorship.

The media wing of the Democratic Party has attempted to tamp down mass opposition by promoting the illusion that Trump is retreating in the face of protests. The real purpose of this narrative is to prevent the development of a mass movement from below that would threaten the political establishment as a whole.

As hundreds of thousands of federal workers have been fired or seen their jobs eliminated, the trade union apparatus has done absolutely nothing. Not a single strike action has been called to defend the livelihoods or basic rights of workers. While the Trump administration carries out the most sweeping purge of public employees in modern American history, the unions are proposing no resistance whatsoever—only empty gestures and legal appeals.

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler responded to the rule change with a statement that starkly exposes the union leadership’s paralysis and complicity. She described the measure as an “unprecedented assault” drawn from “Project 2025,” warning it would purge career public servants, replace them with political loyalists and gut essential

services. Yet after outlining this sweeping attack, Shuler proposed no resistance—only, “We’ll see Mr. Trump in court.”

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) issued a similar boilerplate statement promising an “imminent court challenge” and backing bipartisan legislation to reverse the rule.

The union bureaucracies are not defenders of workers—They are the last line of defense for the dictatorship now being assembled.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for coordinated resistance by the working class to oppose Trump’s attacks on federal workers and the broader conspiracy to impose presidential dictatorship. This is a class war waged by the oligarchy against the democratic and social rights of the working class.

We urge federal workers to begin organizing now: Build rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of the trade union apparatus. These committees must prepare to resist the coming wave of mass firings, oppose the destruction of job protections and fight to defend the rights of all workers.

This struggle must be connected to the growing movement of the working class as a whole—from striking nurses in New York City and healthcare workers in California, to students walking out across the country in protest against ICE murders and abductions, to the millions of workers confronting mass layoffs, job cuts and wage suppression across every industry.

The fight against the jobs massacre is inseparable from the fight against dictatorship and the capitalist system that breeds it. Every section of the working class must be united in a common counteroffensive against the social and political counter-revolution of the oligarchy. The defense of democratic rights requires the development of a powerful, independent political movement of the working class, fighting to overthrow capitalism and reorganize society on the basis of equality, democracy and socialism.



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