

Mass firings at HHS signal next phase in the Trump-Kennedy war on science and public health

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On Tuesday morning, thousands of workers at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awoke to the news that they had been subject to “reduction in force” (RIF) job cuts. The mass firings impacted employees at multiple agencies within HHS, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and more.

“They sent the RIFs at like 5 a.m. for maximum cruelty,” one employee told *Politico*, adding, “They also immediately shut RIF’d people out of their emails so all of the work they do and programs they support are left high and dry.”

Scenes emerged Tuesday morning of dozens of HHS employees lined up outside the door to their building, unable to gain access after having been fired and locked out during the night. Some employees rushed to the office on learning the news of their firing, often by email, to attempt to retrieve their belongings prior to being locked out.

Since Trump’s inauguration, federal workers have endured weeks of anxiety and trepidation about the future of their jobs, careers and families, as well as the ultimate fate of the societal benefits of their work on public health and science more generally. Over 80,000 HHS employees have been on edge since the planned mass firings were announced last Thursday.

The dust has not yet settled, but the cuts appear to have slashed two-thirds of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) workforce. At the FDA, the Office of New Drugs was completely wiped out, including its director, Dr. Peter Stein. Several other leaders at the FDA were eliminated, including the heads of the Center for Biologics Evaluation Research and the Center for Tobacco Products.

Rob Califf, former FDA director under President Joe Biden, posted on LinkedIn:

The FDA as we’ve known it is finished, with most of the leaders with institutional knowledge and a deep understanding of product development and safety no longer employed.

At the CDC, in addition to NIOSH the cuts heavily impacted the

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention. Notably, Kennedy’s stated rationale for the cuts includes “ending America’s epidemic of chronic illness,” with numerous agencies consolidated into a new “Administration for a Healthy America.” The term Orwellian barely begins to describe what is taking place.

The NIH saw cuts of 1,200 staff and scientists, including several senior leaders. The cuts included the directors of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the National Human Genome Research Institute, the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Nursing Research and the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities.

It is highly significant that these cuts coincided with new NIH Director Dr. Jay Bhattacharya’s first day on the job, having been confirmed by the Senate last week. Bhattacharya is notorious as the co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, justifying the Trump administration’s criminal “herd immunity” policy of mass infection, disability and death.

In an email sent to NIH employees on his first day, Bhattacharya cynically wrote that the cuts would be implemented “humanely.” Later on Tuesday, it was revealed that the NIH has scrapped its Final Scientific Integrity Policy, which formerly mandated:

This Policy codifies NIH’s long-standing expectations to preserve scientific integrity throughout all NIH activities, establishes key roles and responsibilities for those who will lead the agency’s scientific integrity program, and, as appropriate, establishes relevant reporting and evaluation mechanisms.

The policy ensured that NIH scientists could report findings and personal views to the public without fear of reprisal, protected individuals who reported allegations of breaches of scientific integrity and established an NIH Scientific Integrity Council, among other things.

Given last month’s announcement that the CDC will initiate a new “study” of the scientifically debunked claims of a link

between vaccines and autism—to be led by the known anti-vaccine fraudster David Geier—the rescission of the NIH scientific integrity policy is highly significant.

The fix is in, and it is easy to predict that Geier will “discover” a link between vaccines and autism where none exists. Republican state legislatures across the country will then use whatever false conclusions are drawn to substantially weaken or even eliminate childhood vaccination requirements. This takes place under conditions in which measles is now surging at rates not seen since the virus was eliminated in 2000, due to the anti-vaccine propaganda of Kennedy, Geier and their ilk.

The savage cuts now unfolding across HHS agencies, as well as the Scientific Integrity Policy rescission, are also intended to send a warning to university-based scientists. Obedience to the official narrative on vaccines, COVID-19, Long COVID, the threat of future pandemics, fluoride and any variety of quackery is demanded and, if not provided, will result in severe consequences.

These cuts, combined with threats to university funding, are having their intended effect. A recent *Nature* poll of 1,600 scientists found that fully 75 percent are now considering leaving the US. This is a stunning reversal of decades of scientists migrating to the US, a major “brain drain” on the other nations of the world which is on the brink of total reversal.

The *World Socialist Web Site* alone has continuously warned of and denounced the Trump administration’s war on science and public health. As we wrote mere days before Trump’s inauguration:

Under the banner “Make America Healthy Again,” Trump, Kennedy and this gang of quacks will do everything in their power to facilitate the spread of disease, including previously eliminated pathogens like measles and new existential threats like H5N1 “bird flu.”

The administration is gutting these agencies, systematically firing scientists and health workers *en masse* and without cause. Thousands of years of collective knowledge and expertise are being shown the door, leaving these agencies without the workforce required to function.

The fact that these agencies are at the forefront of providing healthcare services, protecting the nation’s health, and making leading scientific advances is the reason they are being targeted. The American ruling class is clawing back decades of progress in the well-being of the working class.

At the end of World War II, the United States became the center of the academic and scientific universe. The partnership between the federal government and universities nationwide was the cornerstone of what once made American academia the premier scientific destination.

Since the turn of the century, this preeminence in scientific research had been declining relative to other countries, in particular China, a process which accelerated during the pandemic. But a qualitative turning point has now been reached. In less than three months the Trump administration has set in motion the

complete dismantling of this post-war framework, prompting droves of scientists to head for the exits. Scientific integrity is being ruthlessly discarded, with charlatans like Bhattacharya and Kennedy now in charge of scientific and public health agencies, converting them into engines of disinformation and propaganda.

The Democratic Party and trade union apparatus have not only failed to oppose these fascistic policies, they have enabled them. The Biden administration set the stage for Bhattacharya as NIH director by fully implementing his “herd immunity” policy. Declaring the end of the pandemic, the Biden administration set the stage for the cancellation by Trump this week of hundreds of millions of dollars in public health funding, as well as the NIH cancellation of Long COVID research.

Furthermore, the Democrats first spearheaded efforts to whip up a climate of fear on university campuses. In Democratic strongholds such as New York and California, authorities have brutally repressed campus demonstrations against the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and have capitulated to the Trump administration’s demands to do even more.

The trade unions have worked hand in glove with the Democrats to suppress workers’ resistance to the Trump administration and its war on science and public health. The unions representing swaths of workers fired by the Trump administration and its Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) are not organizing strikes or calling for mass action. Instead, they are urging ineffectual appeals to the Democrats, who are collaborating with the Trump administration on these actions.

The fight for science and public health cannot be separated from the fight for socialism, which requires a political struggle against both capitalist parties. To carry forward this struggle, HHS scientists and other federal workers under assault from the Trump administration must unite with the working class more broadly through rank-and-file committees, under the auspices of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). On the campuses, students and faculty must build sections of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).



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