Trump Administration Attacks on Science

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Trump condemned one of the most effective painkillers. This rhetoric is linked to a general reduction in US research spending.

Details. Recently, Trump accused Tylenol, a common painkiller, of causing autism if used during pregnancy, despite a scientific consensus that no causal link exists. Moreover, US health officials consider Tylenol as the safest painkiller for pregnant women.

► This case is part of the government's broader offensive against science. Thousands of employers in key healthcare and research organisations — notably the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Institute of Health (NIH) and Environmental Protection Agency — have faced abrupt layoffs.

► Funding for science agencies such as the NIH, NASA, Centres for Disease Control (CDC), National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has been cut by 26% to over 50%. Some of them faced bigger cuts: the NIH's budget was reduced by 37%, and the NSF by 55%.

► The administration has banned or flagged over 350 terms related to gender identity, race, equity, climate change, and public health in federal documents, websites, and research papers. Using these banned words can result in scientists losing grants, having studies unpublished, or slowing their career advancement.

Context. Anti-science campaigns have occurred before in capitalist countries. Before World War II, as capitalism hit the limits of profitable expansion, elites promoted mysticism and anti-scientific ideology to slow production, defend class interests, and obscure the material basis of society and the potential of the socialist system.

► In 1932, a survey of 200 members of the Royal Society, the UK's leading scientific academy, found that a majority endorsed a "Spiritual Domain" over materialism.

► In 1933, the Nazis began dismissing "non-Aryans" from social professions and promoting so-called "German physics", which rejected quantum mechanics and relativity theory, emphasising experiments over theoretical work.

► While capitalist countries deliberately restricted technological progress to protect capitalist class interests — for example, US industrial output had dropped to 72% of its 1929 level by 1938 — the Soviet Union actively imported the latest machinery and expanded its productive forces, increasing output nearly fivefold (477% of 1929).

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