

Organizers of March on Washington commemoration defend a criminal administration

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On Saturday, tens of thousands of workers and young people marched to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1963.

The presence of working people expressed the powerful hold on popular consciousness of the ideals of democracy and equality that animated the mass movement for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s and are associated with the event that culminated in King's famous "I have a dream" speech.

However, the politics that dominated Saturday's march, promoted by the organizers and the collection of Democratic politicians, official "civil rights" leaders and union bureaucrats who spoke from the podium, were the antithesis of those ideals. The organizers sought to exploit the anniversary by staging an event backed by the White House whose aim was to channel growing political and social opposition behind a government that is carrying out an unprecedented assault on democratic rights and a further growth of social inequality.

The event took place under the shadow of a new campaign of lies by the Obama administration to justify the launching of a war against Syria—something that no speaker so much as mentioned, doing a further disservice to the memory of King, who opposed the US war in Vietnam.

None other than Obama's attorney general, Eric Holder, who has publicly defended the state assassination of American citizens and illegal spying on the population, told those assembled, "As we gather today, 50 years later, their march is now our march."

Holder spoke for the selfish interests of African

American upper-middle class layers that cashed in on the struggles, sacrifices and martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement when he said, "But for them, I would not be attorney general of the United States, and Barack Obama would not be president of the United States of America."

Not one speaker and not one sponsoring organization uttered the acronym NSA or spoke aloud the names of Bradley Manning or Edward Snowden, giving their tacit support to the government's vendetta against those who expose its crimes.

Speaker after speaker on the podium, including multimillionaire House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, Jessie Jackson, another millionaire, and Newark Mayor and senatorial candidate Cory Booker, strung together empty, demagogic phrases. Each of these individuals attempted to attach the legacy of King to him- or herself and paint King as a "civil rights leader" of the contemporary sort, i.e., a political operator from the most affluent layers of society.

Some of these elements, aware of the social anger over mass unemployment and poverty among the workers and youth in attendance, sought to raise—gingerly and dishonestly—economic issues. The veteran demagogue Al Sharpton, leader of the National Action Network, which organized the protest, told the rally, "We need jobs. Folks want to work, and earn for their family." Sharpton's family, however, can count on his estimated nest egg of \$5 million.

Also silent on the vast growth of social inequality in the United States 50 years after the original march were Bob King, the president of the United Auto Workers, who delivered a religious homily, and Michael Mulgrew, head of New York City's United Federation

of Teachers.

Perhaps the most cynical ploy were the references by a number of speakers to Trayvon Martin, the 17-year-old Florida youth killed in 2012 by vigilante George Zimmerman, who was acquitted of all charges earlier this year. This struck a chord with many in the audience, some of whom wore T-shirts with the image of the youth and carried placards denouncing the reactionary “stand your ground” laws in Florida and elsewhere.

There were also references from the podium to the US Supreme Court’s reactionary ruling in June eviscerating the 1965 Voting Rights Act. That law and the Civil Rights Act of the previous year were the two major legislative gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

Workers and young people came from all over the US, but mainly from the East Coast, the South and the Midwest, to participate in Saturday’s march. The unions, which co-sponsored the event, brought delegations from Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York as well as other states. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and various other civil rights and church groups brought thousands as well. Significantly, a large proportion of the people came on their own.

As one retired postal worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “We have to honor the memory of Martin Luther King for his courage and what he stood for. He was getting death threats and he was prepared to lay down his life, and he did lay down his life for equality and justice. He campaigned for the poor.”

Virtually none of the pseudo-left political tendencies present in Washington sought to draw the connection between the attacks on democratic rights by the Obama administration and the struggle for civil rights fifty years ago. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) did not issue any political statement or separate itself from the pro-Obama and pro-Democratic Party politics of the march organizers, underscoring its role as a fake-left appendage of the Democratic Party.

The only political tendency that fought to draw the connection between the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement for democracy and equality 50 years ago and the wholesale assault on democratic rights under the Obama administration was the Socialist Equality Party. SEP supporters distributed thousands of copies of a statement by Fred Mazelis, a founder of the SEP

who participated in the original 1963 march.

The statement stressed that it was not possible to defend democratic rights without a struggle against capitalism. “The Achilles’ heel of the civil rights movement, and even its most radical and sincere representatives such as King,” Mazelis wrote, “was its failure to break with the Democratic Party and recognize that the aims of social equality and democratic rights were realizable only in a struggle for socialism.”



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