

The October 18 “No Kings” demonstrations and the fight against Trump’s dictatorship

Socialist Equality Party (US)
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The second wave of “No Kings” demonstrations took place on Saturday, October 18, bringing millions of youth, workers, professionals and retired people into the streets to show their determination to fight the Trump administration’s Operation Dictatorship and their disgust at the anticommunist smears hurled at them by top officials of this authoritarian regime.

The more than 2,700 separate demonstrations in cities and towns throughout the United States were, collectively, one of the largest political demonstrations in the history of the country. Organizers estimated seven million people participated, two million more than they said took part in the first round of “No Kings” rallies in June.

Mass marches of hundreds of thousands were held in major cities, including New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington D.C., while hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands more rallied in smaller cities and towns across the country. In Europe, thousands joined parallel demonstrations in London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Stockholm and Rome, as well as in dozens of smaller cities.

The scale and breadth of participation explodes the official narrative, promoted by the corporate media and the Democratic Party, that Trump is an unchallengeable political colossus. The reality, revealed in the streets on October 18, is that Trump and his coterie of fascist cabinet figures face enormous and growing opposition.

Participants, many with homemade signs, denounced the destruction of democratic rights, the assault on immigrants, the deployment of troops to cities, the mass firings of federal workers and the dismantling of social programs. Protesters also opposed the genocide in Gaza, the enrichment of the oligarchy amid mass poverty, and the accelerating drive toward dictatorship and war.

The vilification of the protests in advance by Trump, Vice President JD Vance, Speaker Mike Johnson and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt angered but did not intimidate those who took to the streets Saturday. If anything, the hysterical denunciation of protesters as “Hamas supporters,” “antifa terrorists,” “illegal aliens” and “hardened criminals” only increased the turnout.

The sentiments animating these demonstrations are far to the left of anything expressed within the Democratic Party. Masses of people are coming into conflict not only with the fascistic Trump administration, but also with the Democrats, who represent another faction of the capitalist oligarchy.

Trump gave his answer to the protests on Sunday, declaring in a pre-recorded discussion with Fox News’ Maria Bartiromo, “Don’t forget: I can use the Insurrection Act.” The invocation of the act, which top administration officials have indicated is imminent, would sanction the deployment of active-duty military forces under the direction of the president. Trump directly threatened Democratic Party-controlled states and indicated that he was planning to send the National Guard into San Francisco.

The day of the protest, Trump, true to his Nazi upbringing and

intellectual debasement, responded with filth—literally. He shared on his social media account a video showing the aspiring Führer wearing a crown and piloting a plane, emblazoned with the words “King Trump,” dumping feces over protesters in Times Square. Another AI video, posted by Vance, depicted Trump being crowned and unsheathing a sword, as Democratic Party politicians bowed before him.

House Speaker Mike Johnson gave voice to the deepest fears of the American ruling class, telling ABC News’ “This Week” interview program that he would “talk with you about the dangers of Marxism and socialism” every week. He added, “It is a dangerous ideology, and it is anti-American. It goes against everything that we stand for.” Referring to the likely election of Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York, on a program of limited reforms that he is rapidly repudiating, Johnson warned of the “rise of Marxism in the Democratic Party.”

The violent denunciations of the October 18 demonstrations by Trump and the Republican fascists, accompanied by threats of violence, express the terror of the capitalist oligarchs over the growing opposition and political radicalization of the population. They see in every manifestation of protest the specter of a socialist revolution. In their fascistic world view, even the toothless reformist appeals of the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party of the American ruling class, is viewed as inciting rebellion and legitimizing socialism.

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. The Democratic Party is deeply hostile to the mass opposition on display Saturday and is working rapidly to downplay its significance. It shares to a great extent Trump’s economic and social policy aims and is opposed to any mass movement against Trump.

This was expressed most clearly by the *New York Times*, the principal newspaper aligned with the Democratic Party, which published two perfunctory articles that appeared in small print on the front page of its website Sunday morning.

The first article, which was published on page A17 of its print edition, “‘No More Trump’: Protesters Denouncing the President Unite Across the Country,” avoided giving any estimate of crowd sizes and made no effort to convey the immense scope of the demonstrations. The second, “Vance Flexes the Marines’ Might as Thousands Protest Trump’s Agenda,” wrote, incredibly, that “thousands of people across the country protested a president they accused of using his power like a king” (emphasis added). By Sunday evening, even these two articles had been removed from the front page of the *Times*.

In the lead-up to the October 18 protests, top Democrats ignored that they were even happening. Only on the eve of the demonstrations, when it became clear how large they would be, did party leaders issue tepid statements of support. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer posted photos of himself marching alongside union officials in New York City, declaring blandly, “We have no dictators in America”—a statement contradicted by the fact that Trump is, with Democratic Party complicity, acting as a dictator.

The intervention of the Democrats is aimed entirely at defusing opposition and channeling the immense anger of millions back behind the party's own reactionary, pro-war and pro-capitalist agenda. This became even clearer the following day, when leading Democrats acted as if the largest protest movement in US history had never occurred.

On ABC's "This Week," following Johnson, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries made no mention of the demonstrations, Trump's AI propaganda videos, or the ongoing conspiracy to establish a presidential dictatorship. Instead, he focused entirely on appeals for "bipartisanship" and "negotiation" with the Republicans to end the government shutdown. "We want to sit down, find a bipartisan path forward to enacting a spending agreement," Jeffries said, while touting the possibility of a "deal" with Trump over Affordable Care Act subsidies.

Those who posture as the "left" within the Democratic Party—above all, Senator Bernie Sanders—play a particularly foul role. Sanders' last-minute decision to parachute into the main rally in Washington D.C., after previously planning to address a small event in Vermont, was a calculated intervention aimed at channeling the growing radicalization of millions back into the safe confines of the Democratic Party.

Sanders' speech was demagogic in its purest form—a compendium of moral appeals and denunciations of billionaires devoid of any political content. While invoking "freedom," "democracy," and the danger of authoritarianism, he never once mentioned capitalism or socialism. Sanders spoke of "fighting for working families," but he offered no explanation of what type of struggle he proposed, because he does not propose one.

The most significant statement Sanders made was his declaration: "I say to my Republican colleagues, come back from your month-long vacation, start negotiating, and do not allow the American healthcare system to be destroyed. End this shutdown." These "colleagues" are Trump's fascist co-conspirators. To address them as partners in "negotiation" under conditions where the government is preparing to invoke the Insurrection Act and deploy the military against the population is not simply naive. It is an act of political complicity.

Then there is the trade union apparatus, which made no effort to mobilize its members for the demonstrations, even among those unions that formally endorsed them, though many workers attended on their own.

In New York City, there was no significant organized contingent of workers, and the separate "labor rally" held nearby was poorly attended and dominated by officials, not rank-and-file workers. The United Auto Workers (UAW) did not endorse the demonstration or mobilize its members in Detroit, the historic center of the American auto industry. The UAW apparatus under Shawn Fain has openly aligned itself with the Trump administration's program of economic nationalism and trade war.

The "No Kings" demonstrations represent a significant political turning point. Since the last demonstrations in June, Trump's conspiracy to erect a dictatorship has accelerated, generating enormous opposition throughout the country. Hostility to Trump is rapidly extending to his collaborators in the Democratic Party, as NBC noted in a report from the Washington demonstration, quoting a construction worker as saying, "I don't have a lot of faith in the Democratic Party right now." Another worker commented, "By and large, the Democratic Party is also bought by corporate interests, and they fail to stand up for the average working people."

It is quite unusual for the corporate media to report on such sentiments. Even more extraordinary was the report in the US edition of the British newspaper *The Guardian*, which noted: "Leftist groups have called for the enunciation of a clear political program and concrete demands. In an 15 October statement, No Kings, No Nazi Führers! Mobilize the Working Class Against Trump's Dictatorship!, the Socialist Equality Party said the central slogan, 'No Kings,' articulates vast popular hostility to autocracy but warned that 'anger and outrage are not enough to stop dictatorship.'"

It is an objective fact that the Socialist Equality Party was the only organization to place "a clear political program and concrete demands" before this mass audience. SEP members and supporters, as well as members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, distributed tens of thousands of leaflets at dozens of locations across the United States.

These leaflets, reprinting the statement cited above by the *Guardian*, received a warm welcome from marchers coast to coast. Hundreds of copies of a new pamphlet containing recent statements of the SEP, under the title *Trump's Fascist Conspiracy and How to Fight It: A Socialist Strategy*, were sold as well.

The experience of the mass protests against the genocide in Gaza provides a critical lesson. Despite the scale of those demonstrations, involving tens of millions throughout the world, they failed to halt the slaughter because they were politically subordinated to parties of the ruling class, including the Democratic Party in the United States.

In the fight against Trump and fascism, any subordination to the Democratic Party is absolutely fatal. As the SEP statement distributed *en masse* at the rally explains, Trump's regime is not an aberration, but the product of a diseased social order. It is a government of, by and for the oligarchy. Trump, we wrote, "has been chosen to deal with an escalating series of economic, social and geopolitical crises for which no conventional, legal, Constitutional and non-violent solutions are at hand."

The outcome of the present crisis depends on whether the working class, the only truly revolutionary social force, enters the political situation independently, consciously, and with its own program. Millions took to the streets, and many workers participated, but the working class has not yet intervened independently through the methods of class struggle.

The SEP fights for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school, and neighborhood. These committees must take up the defense not only of workers' economic and social interests, but also of their most basic democratic rights, against the police state measures being implemented by the Trump government. They must coordinate nationally and internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to unite the struggles of workers across all industries and borders.

The entry of the working class into political struggle on its own independent basis will transform the entire situation. It will provide a revolutionary pole of attraction for the millions who are opposed to dictatorship and war but lack a clear political alternative.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to arm the growing movement of workers and youth with a clear understanding of the historical, political and class forces at work. The fight against dictatorship in the United States is inseparable from the fight of workers all over the world against imperialist war, social inequality and capitalist exploitation. The path forward lies in uniting the international working class in a common struggle for socialism.



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