The January 23 mass protests in Minneapolis mark a turning point in the fight against dictatorship

Socialist Equality Party (US)
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Read the statement published January 24: "Stop ICE murders and repression! Build a rank-and-file movement for a general strike!"

The massive demonstrations in Minneapolis on January 23 mark a new stage in the development of the class struggle in the United States.

On Friday, more than 100,000 people in Minneapolis, Minnesota, braved sub-zero temperatures and a windchill of -30 degrees Fahrenheit (-34 degrees Celsius) to join the "Day of Truth and Freedom" protests against the murder of Renée Nicole Good by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent and the ongoing federal occupation of the city.

The protest drew in broad layers of the working class—healthcare workers, educators, postal workers and many others—alongside many students and sections of the middle class. Immigrant and native-born protesters marched side by side.

Downtown Minneapolis was taken over by demonstrators whose march stretched over many city blocks. Every skyway was filled with people. Video of the protests show streets packed with people in all directions. Thousands carried signs demanding ICE leave the state, calling for the prosecution of the ICE agent who killed Good and denouncing the rounding up of immigrants, including the abduction of five-year-old Liam Ramos. Some carried banners proclaiming, "We will stop American Nazism," while others invoked the ideals of the American Revolution against tyranny and dictatorship.

In addition to the main rally, smaller demonstrations were held throughout the city. Street corners in neighborhoods became centers of protest, involving dozens to hundreds of people, including families with children.

The massive turnout came in the face of relentless slanders, from Trump and the gang of fascists in the administration, of protesters as "insurrectionists" and "terrorists." Protests were also held in over 100 cities across the country, including walkouts by hundreds of high school students in Georgia and other solidarity actions in major urban centers.

The most important feature of the January 23 protests was not simply the turnout but the popularization of the concept of a general strike. The demand for mass coordinated action has emerged not from trade union officials or politicians but from below. Across the US, a mood of defiance is building, driven by the growing realization that a different power must be mobilized—the power of the working class.

For the past 45 years, the trade union apparatus has suppressed the organized resistance by the working class. Since the crushing of the PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) strike in 1981, every major struggle has been betrayed or shut down by a corporatist union apparatus that identifies its interests with those of the corporations and the state. This was accompanied by a deliberate ideological campaign, promoted by the Democratic Party, to redefine social struggle along racial and gender lines. But this narrative is beginning to break apart.

While the ICE rampage was the immediate catalyst, the protests have erupted amidst an intense and accelerating crisis of American society. The United States has reached a point where the scale of political breakdown and the ferocity of class tensions are generating profound shifts in consciousness. The protests, moreover, have centered on issues of state violence, which is leading the working class into a direct confrontation with the capitalist state itself—not only in Minneapolis but across the country.

Coming out of the January 23 protests, the task now is to build this movement into a conscious, coordinated industrial and political struggle.

The Trump regime is not backing down. In the latest escalation of state violence, federal agents murdered a man observing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) kidnapping operations in Minneapolis on Saturday morning, the day after the protests. The man was on the ground and being beaten by multiple agents, at least seven of whom are visible in the video, when one of the agents stood up and began firing his pistol.

Vice President JD Vance traveled to Minneapolis on the eve of the demonstration to defend ICE and downplay the threat of military intervention, even as the administration threatens to invoke the Insurrection Act to justify the use of federal troops.

As many as 1,500 active-duty soldiers from the 11th Airborne Division are on standby. ICE raids continue daily, with footage emerging of agents threatening to label protesters "domestic terrorists" simply for recording arrests. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has issued a memo asserting sweeping powers to override the Fourth Amendment and raid homes without judicial warrants.

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What is unfolding in Minneapolis is the spearhead of a broader conspiracy to criminalize dissent and establish a military-presidential dictatorship. Trump, acting on behalf of the financial oligarchy, is dispensing with democratic forms of rule. In Davos, he declared: “Sometimes you need a dictator.” He meant it.

The protests of January 23 mark the beginning of a movement in the working class against Trump’s dictatorship. But this power will not develop through the institutions of the Democratic Party or the union bureaucracy. It must be developed from below, through new forms of struggle rooted in the workplaces, neighborhoods and schools where workers and young people can organize their collective strength.

At every point, the trade union apparatus has acted to suppress anger and try to prevent a genuine general strike movement. The national AFL-CIO and most major unions issued no public support for the January 23 action. State and local federations, including the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation, nominally endorsed the protest but insisted workers must remain on the job, citing “no-strike clauses” in contracts they themselves negotiated.

At an indoor event held during the protest at the Target Center, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President April Verrett and Communications Workers of America (CWA) President Claude Cummings Jr. gave speeches filled with empty platitudes and pablum. Their “support” for the demonstration was purely platonic, as none of these officials had called workers that they nominally represent out on strike.

If the unions had called a strike, many workers said, everyone would have walked out. This, indeed, is precisely what the apparatus is determined to prevent. Many workers who participated wore union logos, but there were no organized delegations because the union apparatus explicitly opposed strike action.

The Democratic Party, for its part, has spent the past year doing everything possible to contain, suppress and divert mass opposition to Trump. While posturing as critics of the administration, the Democrats agree with the fundamental premises of Trump’s domestic policy, especially on issues of immigration and “national security.”

In the week leading up to the January 23 protests, while masses of workers and youth were preparing for demonstrations, the Democratic Party was busy ensuring the continued operation of the Trump government. In a series of votes in the House of Representatives, the Democrats helped pass critical appropriations bills, including full funding for the DHS and ICE—the very agencies spearheading the assault on Minneapolis.

Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, has issued vague and impotent warnings about authoritarianism, warning that Trump is threatening democracy. But he offers no political strategy beyond appeals to the courts and preparations for the 2026 election—10 months away, and far from guaranteed to occur under conditions that resemble anything like democratic norms.

The return of Trump to power, as the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, marked a violent realignment of American politics to bring it into conformity with the oligarchic structure of society. Now, the other side of that same historical process is beginning to emerge: The working class is entering into struggle. The events of January 23 must be the foundation for a sustained and coordinated counter-offensive, armed with a clear understanding of the nature of capitalism, the role of the state and the historical tasks now posed before the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the building of rank-and-file committees in every workplace. Every factory, depot, warehouse, office, school and hospital must become a center of organization and political discussion. Workers should hold emergency meetings, elect delegates, draw up demands and link together across industries and regions.

These committees must coordinate mass action, defend those under attack, and lay the foundations for a general strike, that is, the complete shutdown of economic activity. This cannot be limited to Minneapolis. Trump’s conspiracy for dictatorship is national, and the response of the working class must extend across the entire country. Moreover, what is happening in the United States is a concentrated expression of the turn by the ruling class in every country to dictatorship and war.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has been established to provide the structure and leadership for such a global counteroffensive. It fights to connect opposition to fascism and dictatorship with the struggle of the working class against war, job cuts, inflation and social misery.

The Socialist Equality Party urges workers and young people to take this discussion into every workplace, school and neighborhood. Talk with your coworkers and classmates. Begin forming rank-and-file committees to plan and coordinate mass action, share information and prepare for the next stage of the struggle.

The development of the class struggle against dictatorship must raise the fundamental political questions: This is not only a fight against a criminal government but against the social forces that stand behind it. The entire state apparatus—ICE, the DHS, the police, the military—exists to defend the wealth and power of the capitalist oligarchy. To defeat dictatorship, war and repression, the working class must take up a conscious struggle against the capitalist system itself and fight for socialism.

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