

Trump's tactical retreat in Minneapolis: The danger of dictatorship remains

Patrick Martin, Joseph Kishore
27 January 2026

Over the past 24 hours, the Trump administration has been forced into a tactical retreat following the state execution of ICU nurse Alex Jeffrey Pretti by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis. The retraction, however, is not an abandonment of its authoritarian course—It is a recalibration. The threat of dictatorship remains as present and grave as ever.

Facing a wave of public outrage and protest, the White House has sought to walk back the most inflammatory lies and attacks issued by Trump's top officials in the immediate aftermath of Pretti's killing. On Monday, Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, pointedly did not defend statements by Stephen Miller and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, who labeled Pretti a "domestic terrorist" who tried to "assassinate" law enforcement. Leavitt instead insisted that "we will let the facts lead" and claimed, in an obvious lie, that "nobody in the White House, including President Trump, wants to see people getting hurt or killed."

At the same time, the administration removed senior Border Patrol official Gregory Bovino from Minneapolis, whose false claims about Pretti were among the first to circulate. Several agents are reportedly being withdrawn, and Trump's tone has shifted—from blaming Minnesota Governor Tim Walz for "inciting violence" to hailing a phone call with him as showing they were "on the same wavelength."

This shift is not the result of moral reconsideration or pressure from Democratic politicians. It is the outcome of mass protests, mounting popular anger and a growing movement throughout the country about the need for a general strike. The White House understands that the murder of Alex Pretti—coming just two weeks after the execution of Renée Nicole Good in the same city—has provoked the most serious political crisis of

Trump's second presidency.

This limited pullback only underscores how Trump's rampage has been facilitated by the Democratic Party. For the past year, the Democrats and media presented Trump as an unstoppable force, claiming that nothing can be done but wait for the next elections. In fact, Trump's ability to carry out a rampage against the Constitution has depended entirely on the complicity, silence and cowardice of Democratic officials at every level.

To interpret this partial withdrawal as evidence that the threat has passed would be a fatal mistake. The administration is not abandoning its plans for a presidential dictatorship. The invocation of the Insurrection Act remains on the table. Trump has repeatedly said he will be a "dictator on day one," and he is making good on that threat. This is not the first time a despot has thrown a number of underlings to the wolves, if only temporarily, to regroup, and anything Trump does one day can be immediately reversed the next.

It is striking that amid all the initial cheering from the Democratic Party-aligned media about the supposed triumph of "democracy," not one word has been said about the fact that Donald Trump, the orchestrator of this reign of terror, remains in office. No one has been held accountable. Alex Pretti's killers remain unnamed and at large. The instigators of the crime—above all, Trump himself, along with White House adviser Stephen Miller, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, ICE Acting Director Todd Lyons, and FBI Director Kash Patel—remain in power.

Leading Democrats are moving rapidly to spread complacency, defuse popular anger and portray the situation as under control. On Monday, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz described his phone call with

Trump as “productive.” This is the same Donald Trump whom Walz had accurately described just 12 days earlier as carrying out “a campaign of organized brutality against the people of Minnesota.” What changed?

According to Trump, Walz “called him” and said they should “work together.” In response, Trump pledged to send border czar Tom Homan to Minnesota and to ensure cooperation in transferring “any and all criminals” in state custody to ICE. Trump declared the call “very good” and claimed that he and Walz were “on a similar wavelength.” Trump’s spokesperson made clear that the administration’s goal remains the forced handover of all undocumented immigrants, with the full cooperation from state and local police.

Walz’s office, for its part, echoed the warm tone. It stated that Trump had agreed to “work in a more coordinated fashion on immigration enforcement regarding violent criminals” and to consider “reducing the number of federal agents in Minnesota.” The governor’s office even claimed that Trump would help ensure “independent investigations” into the killings of Alex Pretti and Renée Nicole Good.

This statement is an insult to the intelligence of the public. It implies that the chief instigator of the repression will now ensure a proper investigation of the crimes his administration ordered and defended.

The consensus within the US ruling class on the need to try to shut down the protests in Minnesota was expressed in the decision of the *Wall Street Journal* to publish an op-ed column by Minnesota Governor Walz. The ultra-right newspaper, owned by billionaire Rupert Murdoch, has criticized Trump’s handling of immigration as unnecessarily provocative, editorializing that the killing of Alex Pretti “calls for rethinking how ICE conducts itself, especially in Minneapolis as tensions build.”

In his column, while reiterating certain criticisms of Trump’s methods, Walz maintained that Minnesota is in fact cooperating with ICE by handing over immigrant prisoners for deportation, and declared, “Everyone wants to see our immigration laws enforced.”

The greatest fear of the Democratic Party is not dictatorship, but the independent intervention of the working class. Their central political objective is to block, disorient and suppress the development of a

mass movement from below. They also want to create better political conditions to pass all funding bills to prevent a government shutdown—to keep financing the Trump administration and, in particular, the massive apparatus of imperialist aggression with no disruption.

The protests of January 23, which brought over 100,000 people into the streets of Minnesota, were not organized by the political establishment. They arose from the working class and from the youth. The demand for a general strike is gaining momentum. In schools, hospitals, factories and warehouses, workers are discussing how to fight back.

This is the most significant development in American political life. What frightens the ruling class is not just the exposure of a crime. It is the emergence of a mass, working class movement that threatens the dictatorship not only in form but in substance—that is, the dictatorship of capital.

The movement that has been set into motion must not stop. The demonstrations, strikes and mobilizations must continue and deepen. Preparations must advance for mass action, including a nationwide general strike. All the conditions that drove tens of thousands into the streets remain: ICE murders and raids, mass detention and deportation, the escalation of global war, the growth of fascism, and above all, the domination of society by a financial oligarchy that is incompatible with democracy.

This regime is not pulling back. It is regrouping. Its agenda remains: a police state at home, conquest abroad and the defense of obscene wealth and power through repression and violence. The working class must respond with even greater determination and clarity of purpose—through organization, unity and the building of a revolutionary socialist leadership.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact