

Left Voice: An accomplice of labor bureaucracy in Minneapolis

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Over the past month, as Minneapolis became the epicenter of an explosive confrontation between the working class and the Trump administration's authoritarian offensive, *Left Voice* provided a revealing case study in the role of the political pseudo-left.

Under "Operation Metro Surge," thousands of federal immigration and border agents were deployed into Minneapolis. Heavily armed paramilitary squads carried out sweeping raids and mass detentions. On January 7, ICE agents killed Renée Nicole Good. On Jan. 24, Customs and Border Patrol agents shot and killed ICU nurse Alex Pretti. The open justification of these killings by Trump and his spokesmen underscored the fascistic trajectory of the administration and its drive toward police-military rule.

The response from below was explosive. Neighborhood defense networks sprang up. High school students walked out. Workers discussed strike action. Calls for a general strike did not originate from union headquarters or Democratic Party offices, but from workers and young people themselves. On January 23, more than 50,000 people marched through Minneapolis' streets in subzero temperatures.

Promoting the trade union apparatus

From the outset, however, the decisive obstacle to the organized intervention of the working class was the labor bureaucracy. And from the outset, *Left Voice* worked to anchor workers' hopes to that apparatus.

In the run-up to January 23, *Left Voice* promoted the claim that unions were on the verge of leading a general strike. Its January 21 article, "Working-Class Minnesota Is Rising Up Against ICE. Unions Must Shut It All Down," amplified statements by local union officials and presented them as the central lever of struggle. After citing officials who had endorsed the day of action, it declared that "as we inch closer to Friday, we've heard similar declarations from other sectors of the labor movement, all of whom are rearing to go in this fight against Trump's anti-immigrant offensive."

The refusal of some unions to violate "no-strike" clauses was acknowledged but treated as a secondary issue. The essential political line was that the union apparatus had endorsed the action and that the task was to push them further. To take the demand for "no work" to its "most powerful conclusion," the article says, "labor must do more than support it—it must mobilize to strike."

This was a political fraud. The union apparatus had no intention of sanctioning strike action. Their statements were carefully worded expressions of "solidarity" designed to defuse anger while keeping members on the job.

When January 23 arrived, the masses marched not because of the union leadership but in spite of it. It was not a general strike, however. Public

sector, logistics, manufacturing and service workers were prepared to act collectively. They were blocked by union officials invoking contract language and legal constraints—working in alignment with Democratic Party politicians determined to prevent the shutdown of the city.

In its January 26 coverage, *Left Voice* concealed this essential fact. Instead of exposing the bureaucracy's role, it highlighted the presence of unionized workers in the crowd, writing that "transit workers, teachers, airport workers, nurses, and service workers—dotted the crowd." It added that "whether they came with unions or not, workers showed up."

But the question was not whether workers attended as individuals. The question was why the official "labor organizations" prevented them from striking collectively.

Rather than call for a break with the apparatus, *Left Voice* speculated about what might have happened "if" union leaders had gone all out—"walking off the job and stopping operations until their demands are met." This hypothetical posture functioned to obscure the political responsibility of the bureaucracy.

The conclusion followed predictably. Workers needed to "break the passivity of union leaders and Democratic politicians" and pressure them to act. Even the national AFL-CIO was urged to "put words into real action."

The day after the mass protest, the Trump administration escalated repression with the cold-blooded murder of Alex Pretti. The defense of the killing by federal officials provoked broader opposition nationally. A coalition, including the Somali Student Association at the University of Minnesota, called for a "national shutdown" on January 30.

The trade union boycott of that action was unmistakable. *Left Voice* was compelled to acknowledge that "union officials issue statements of solidarity while keeping their members at work," and that "support on paper is not support in practice." Yet the answer, it insisted, was for "union leaders" to now "take up the fight."

Across the country, the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, United Auto Workers and other national unions paid lip service to the resistance in Minneapolis but opposed collective action, citing contractual restrictions. In response, *Left Voice* wrote a January 30 article under the headline, "Why Aren't the Largest U.S. Labor Unions Calling a General Strike Against ICE?"

It noted that UAW President Shawn Fain's statement declared that "the labor movement must not be silent" and that the "killing of peaceful protesters like Alex Pretti threatens our rights and our Constitution." *Left Voice* acknowledged that the statement contained "no mention of immigrants, ICE, or Trump" and "no call to action." It concluded by asking: "What are we waiting for?"

Left Voice linked to a WSWs exposure of union officials invoking anti-strike clauses and legal threats. Yet it opposed the WSWs conclusion that organizing a general strike required a revolt against the bureaucracy and the building of independent rank-and-file committees.

It offered descriptions of the bureaucracy's role as "containment,"

prioritizing “order” and “stability.” It wrote that the bureaucracy’s “material position—negotiating with bosses and the state—aligns their interests with ‘stability.’”

Seeking to adapt itself to growing anger among workers over the role of the apparatus, *Left Voice* raised the call to “take back our unions” through “militant rank-and-file assemblies.” Workers were told to “push our unions” to follow the lead of Minneapolis and mobilize for a national strike.

For *Left Voice*, however, such “assemblies” are presented as instruments not to replace and abolish the apparatus, but to pressure it into action. The bureaucracy remains the indispensable agency of struggle.

Cover for the Democratic Party

Connected to the promotion of the trade union apparatus is the cover-up of the role of the Democratic Party, expressed in the response of *Left Voice* to the Democratic Party’s maneuvers to “de-escalate” the crisis in Minneapolis.

In coordination with the Trump administration, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey deployed state and local police to arrest protesters and collaborate in enforcement operations. Federal officials reduced their visible presence while continuing operations. Customs and Border Patrol commander Greg Bovino was replaced by “border czar” Tom Homan, originally appointed under Barack Obama. ICE operations were not halted; they were reorganized and redeployed.

Acting ICE Director Todd Lyons explained before Congress: “We’ve seen a deescalation in protests, so our agents can do their intelligence-driven enforcement operations.”

This was not a retreat. It was a tactical adjustment facilitated by Democratic officials who sought to tamp down mass opposition.

Yet *Left Voice* characterized these developments as “notable concessions won by the movement.” It suggested that Democrats were walking a “delicate tightrope,” and that the administration’s “brute force” had been “outmatched.”

In a statement on February 1, *Left Voice* wrote that “The Democratic Party has finally been pressured to mount some opposition in order to rein in ICE, reaching a deal to revisit the agency’s funding in two weeks. These are just a few examples of the ongoing bipartisan operation to de-escalate tensions around immigration nationally and in Minneapolis in particular.”

The lesson of the protests in Minneapolis, according to *Left Voice*, is that as a result of mass opposition, the Democrats, and indeed the Trump administration, can be pressured to “de-escalate tensions.” Whatever the rhetorical criticisms of the Democrats, the position of *Left Voice* is that the ruling class will back down if there are just more protests: “Winning our demands means pushing the fight forward with all our might.”

This is complacent and politically dangerous. The reduction in visible federal presence was not a “concession” but a maneuver to reorganize repression more effectively. Local Democrats helped clear the streets so federal operations could proceed with less resistance.

The Trump administration is redeploying to expand ICE operations in other cities and states. The agency is spending more than \$38 billion in the construction of a vast apparatus of detention and deportation in California, Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, Michigan and other states.

Left Voice’s formulation that “both the Trump administration and the Democratic Party are starting to understand” the risk of mass outrage implies that pressure alone compels concessions and that the system can be forced to retreat through protest. The real lessons are the opposite.

“Left” politics without socialism

Bound up with *Left Voice*’s promotion of the trade union apparatus and its running cover for the Democratic Party is a deliberate effort to obscure what is in fact the most fundamental issue: the connection between Trump’s developing dictatorship and the capitalist system. In more than a dozen articles on Minneapolis since Good’s killing, *Left Voice* offers no socialist perspective. There is, indeed, not a single reference to “socialism” or “socialist.” “Capitalism,” “capitalist” and the “ruling class” are never referenced, nor are “fascism,” “fascist” and “oligarchy.”

In its February 1 statement, *Left Voice* declares: “What is at stake in Minneapolis is nothing other than the glue that keeps [Trump’s] coalition together: immigration.” This is false and politically disarming. Immigration is a critical arena in which the state is testing methods of repression, but it is not the “glue” of Trump’s coalition or the state apparatus.

The real cohesive force is the class interests of the capitalist oligarchy. The turn to authoritarianism flows from the deepening crisis of American capitalism and the ruling class’s determination to impose austerity, social devastation and imperialist war. These policies cannot be carried out through democratic means.

The Democrats and the labor bureaucracy fear nothing more than an independent movement from below that escapes their control and threatens the capitalist system they defend.

In opposition to the independent mobilization of the working class against capitalism, *Left Voice* advances an orientation to the trade union bureaucracy and the institutions of the capitalist nation-state.

This is the expression of a definite political tradition. *Left Voice* traces its origins to the Morenito current, a Pabloite tendency associated with the late Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno, whose hallmark has always been rhetorical phraseology combined with adaptation to existing bureaucratic structures and the capitalist state within the national framework.

In 1963, Moreno split with the International Committee of the Fourth International and joined forces with the Pabloite revisionists, whose perspective was to dissolve the Fourth International into the existing bureaucratic and nationalist agencies of bourgeois rule—Stalinism, social democracy and various bourgeois nationalist movements.

In Latin America, Morenito organizations routinely tailed union leaders and petty-bourgeois nationalist movements, offering “left” criticism while treating these forces as contradictory allies to be pressured rather than as a privileged social layer integrated into the apparatus of class rule.

The same method is evident today in the response to the events in Minneapolis.

The lesson of Minneapolis is not that the bureaucracy requires more pressure. It is that it must be politically confronted and overcome. The experience has shown that the union apparatus and the various organizations that operate around the Democratic Party function as instruments of containment, working to divert resistance into harmless channels and prevent the emergence of an independent movement of the working class against repression and dictatorship.

What is required is the building of independent rank-and-file committees—among union and non-union workers alike—democratically controlled by workers themselves, capable of breaking the stranglehold of the apparatus and organizing collective action. These committees must establish direct lines of communication across workplaces, industries and state lines, uniting workers as the leading social force in the fight against Trump’s authoritarian offensive.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is working to encourage the development of such organizations, providing a framework for unifying struggles and linking the defense of basic democratic rights to the social interests of the working class: jobs, wages, safety and the right to live without fear of state violence.

The fight against dictatorship is inseparable from a fight against capitalism and for socialism. This cannot be fought through appeals to the institutions that defend capitalist rule. It requires the conscious development of a genuine revolutionary leadership in the working class—based on the independent organization of workers, the unification of struggles across industries and borders, and a clear program to defend democratic rights by mobilizing the social power of the working class against the corporate and financial oligarchy.



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