

Actors, performers oppose Trump at No Kings protests and elsewhere—the question of the Democratic Party looms large

David Walsh
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Vast opposition exists to the Trump administration, its illegal war against Iran, its vile, anti-democratic assault on immigrants, its aspirations to fascism and dictatorship.

Millions assembled and marched on Saturday throughout the US, in virtually every sizable community. At least 320 “No Kings” protests took place in California, 160 in Massachusetts, 120 in Michigan, at least 50 in the New York City metropolitan area alone, and so forth.

Actors, musicians and others have raised their voices in protests in recent months, and specifically on March 28.

Speaking at the No Kings rally in New York, veteran actor Robert De Niro told the crowd that he supported the anti-Trump movement “150 percent.” No other president has been such an “existential threat” to constitutional rights as Trump, he continued. “The president “must be stopped, he must be stopped now.” De Niro went on:

It’s time to say no to kings. It’s time to say no to Donald Trump. We’ve had enough. No King Trump, no unnecessary wars that rob our resources, sacrifice our brave servicemen and women and slaughter innocents. No corrupt leader enriching himself and the Epstein class buddies. No taking away healthcare from our most vulnerable neighbors, no unaffordable groceries, no unaffordable energy, no unaffordable housing and no inflation at its highest level since COVID. No government masked thugs shooting down our neighbors in the streets. Trump has to be stopped.

The actor added that Trump “can’t do all the f—ed up things he’s been doing without the collusion of Congress and the goons in his administration...It’s diabolical...They should be afraid of us.”

At the “flagship” No Kings rally in St. Paul, Minnesota, singer-musician Bruce Springsteen, like De Niro a target of ferocious verbal attacks by the president, took the stage at the state capitol and commented:

This past winter, federal troops brought death and terror to the streets of Minneapolis. Well, they picked the wrong city. The power and the solidarity of the people of Minneapolis, of Minnesota, was an inspiration to the entire country. Your strength and your commitment told us that this is still America. And this reactionary nightmare and these invasions of American cities will not stand.

Springsteen told the thousands in attendance, “You gave us hope, you

gave us courage, and for those who gave their lives, Renée Nicole Good, mother of three, brutally murdered, Alex Pretti, VA nurse, executed by ICE, shot in the back and left to die in the street without even the decency of our lawless government investigating their deaths. Their bravery, their sacrifice, and their names will not be forgotten.”

Actress Jane Fonda also appeared at the St. Paul rally, principally reading a statement from Becca Good, Renée Good’s wife, which referred to all the people victimized by this “horrible moment in history.”

Joan Baez, Maggie Rogers and Tom Morello performed Bob Dylan’s “The Times They Are A-Changin’” at the St. Paul rally.

“Science Guy” Bill Nye and *M*A*S*H* actor Mike Farrell spoke at other protests. At a rally in West Hollywood, Farrell told those in attendance:

I do not offer a thank you to anyone who might be here, perhaps out of uniform and unmasked, from the Gestapo—also known as ICE, or the Border Patrol, also known as brutes with guns—who might be here spying, looking for decent human beings who are unacceptable to them.

A day earlier, on March 27, Fonda, Baez, Rogers and others appeared at the “Artists United for our Freedoms” rally near the Trump-Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. That venue has become a focal point of opposition since its takeover by Trump and his cronies, who ousted the former governing board and renamed the federally financed arts center after the would-be dictator.

Also in attendance Friday in Washington were musical performer Billy Porter, actors Sam Waterston and Griffin Dunne, singers Crys Matthews and Kristy Lee and poet Rupi Kaur. Waterston, Porter and Dunne read from the transcript of left-wing singer Paul Robeson’s defiant appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1956.

Fonda commented at the rally, “Today, books are being banned, plaques and monuments depicting historical events this administration wants to forget are being removed. Museums, the National Endowment for the Arts, state arts councils, public broadcasting—they’re all being defunded.”

Last autumn Fonda “relaunched” the Committee for the First Amendment, the organization set up in September 1947 to oppose the Hollywood witch-hunt, to which Fonda’s father, Henry Fonda, belonged. Many film industry personalities, including Humphrey Bogart, Lucille Ball, Bette Davis, Judy Garland, Burt Lancaster, Groucho Marx, Sterling Hayden, Edward G. Robinson and dozens of others joined the free speech committee.

Hundreds of performers and artists have signed on to the new Committee for the First Amendment, prominently among them Billie

Eilish, Cynthia Nixon, Barbra Streisand, Anne Hathaway, Christine Lahti, Jon Hamm, Mark Ruffalo, Melanie Griffith and scores of others.

Artists have also responded in recent weeks to the criminal, unprovoked attack on Iran instigated by the US and Israeli governments.

Musician Jack White, former lead singer of the White Stripes, scathingly attacked Trump on social media following the launch of the war:

Don't you love seeing him declare war on a country while wearing a trucker hat that says 'USA' on it? Behold the leader of the 'Board of Peace.' For the next war announcement...may I suggest having your feet up on the Resolute desk while eating a Big Mac in a velvet track suit? Venezuela, Greenland, Iran, Cuba, what's the difference right? Don jr. and Barron won't have to fight or die, just other people's children, so...invade and bomb away!

To their credit, John Cusack, Rosie O'Donnell, Mark Ruffalo, Kathy Griffin, Carrie Coon (*The White Lotus*), Stephen King and others also attacked Trump over the war against Iran. O'Donnell posted two quotes from Trump's 2024 presidential campaign "I am the candidate of peace. I am peace." The second read, "I'm not going to start a war, I'm going to stop wars." A number of the artists cited Trump's desire to divert attention from the Epstein files. Best-selling author King tweeted, "Impeach the SOB."

Fonda too has criticized the Iran war. At an antiwar rally in Los Angeles shortly after the attack on Iran, she told a crowd,

The people of the United States are here to tell the Trump administration: You may wage this war in our names, but not with our consent. Right now, [Iranian] parents are pulling their children out of the rubble. This dangerous and insane war against Iran not only violates international law and our Constitution, but risks exploding into a vast war of mass proportion, taking the lives of many, including US service people.

Every honest criticism of the Trump administration and the American ruling elite's assault on democracy, drive to dictatorship and homicidal war on Iran is welcome. Every exposure of the government's lies, every puncturing of its public posturing helps undermine confidence in an utterly rotten political and economic system.

However, that hardly resolves all the political issues and contradictions embedded in the present situation. The leading performers mentioned—Fonda, De Niro, Springsteen and Baez—all have histories of supporting the Democratic Party or one or another of its candidates, including various "mavericks." Springsteen and Fonda appeared on a platform in St. Paul Saturday groaning with Democratic Party politicians, including Sen. Bernie Sanders, Rep. Ilhan Omar, Gov. Tim Walz, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan and Attorney General Keith Ellison. Walz introduced Springsteen.

In their comments, the prominent actors and musicians hewed closely to the Democratic Party line. Aside from De Niro's reference to "the collusion of Congress," there was no mention of the Democrats' complicity with Trump all down the line, including on the massive aggression against Iran. In regard to the latter, in keeping with the official No Kings strictures, there was again almost no mention this past weekend of this brutal conflict by any of the artists. The general implication, left hanging in the air, was that the answer to the fascist Trump was voting for the Democrats in the mid-term elections (De Niro referred limply, for

example, to the solution lying in the "ballot box.")

The Democrats, however, are not an opposition party, they are a party of imperialism, soaked in blood from head to foot. They agree in fundamentals with Trump's reactionary and sinister measures, objectively driven by the crisis of American and world capitalism, only differing on tactical and entirely secondary questions.

Fonda's refounding of the Committee for the First Amendment brings to the fore important historical and political questions, which her group has not addressed. The original committee was established to fight the HUAC witch-hunt in September 1947, but collapsed rapidly and ignominiously, however, under the blows of an anti-communist smear campaign.

The Hollywood left in general disintegrated in the face of the original McCarthyism, while American liberalism openly embraced the most vicious opponents of democratic rights.

In terms of the present artistic-Hollywood opposition to Trump, we have no "sincerometer," an instrument for measuring political sincerity, but, as Lenin noted, "We have no need of one ... we do already have an instrument for defining trends," i.e., the Marxist instrument of class analysis.

Again, the vocal opposition to Trump's wars, at home and abroad, is timely, but the basis for a movement to *drive out this administration* will have to be anti-capitalist and socialist, because there is no fight against war and authoritarianism without a fight against capitalism today. This also means that a genuine anti-war, anti-fascist movement must be independent of and implacably hostile to all the political parties and organizations of the capitalist ruling class, including every wing and faction of the Democratic Party.

The growth of profound radicalism among the artists is inevitable, given the present intolerable conditions created by capitalism. The force and influence of such a movement will not depend on a sudden turnaround in the orientation of an older generation, but above all in the upsurge of the working class in struggle and the consequent emergence of genuine, fierce opposition to the *entire status quo* by primarily younger and more determined artists.



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