

The March 28 “No Kings” demonstrations: The political lessons

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The third round of “No Kings” demonstrations on March 28 drew millions of people into the streets across the United States in what was the largest single-day protest in American history. Organizers estimated that roughly 8 million people participated in more than 3,300 events across the 50 states in every major city, along with hundreds of small towns.

The scale of individual demonstrations was extraordinary: Minneapolis–St. Paul, designated the national flagship event, drew between 100,000 and 200,000 people to the State Capitol grounds. Large protests were reported in major urban centers across the country, including an estimated 350,000 in New York City; 180,000 in Boston (double what was expected); 200,000 in Chicago; 90,000 in Seattle and 40,000 in San Diego. Organizers stated that roughly 600 events took place in predominantly rural, Republican-leaning communities, underscoring the national breadth of opposition.

The scale of the March 28 protests reflected the depth of popular anger at the advance of dictatorship at home and the escalation of imperialist war abroad. A collision is unfolding between a capitalist oligarchy that is breaking with democratic forms of rule and the broad mass of the population.

The war against Iran, now one month old, was a decisive animating force for those participating. While it was downplayed by the organizations that called the protests, opposition was expressed in signs and chants in city after city. As the demonstrations were taking place, Trump was preparing a further escalation with potentially catastrophic consequences for the planet. The day after the protests, the *Washington Post* reported that the Pentagon is preparing for “weeks or months” of ground operations in Iran and that planning for such operations “has been in development for weeks,” under the cover of fraudulent negotiations.

The scale of the opposition terrifies the ruling class, and the response of the corporate media was to downplay it and move on as quickly as possible. In its cursory report, the *New York Times* framed the demonstrations not as a mass eruption of opposition to war and dictatorship, but as a vehicle for “frustrated Democrats” and midterm maneuvering. The Sunday cable news programs the day after barely mentioned the largest protest in American history.

The question that must be confronted is: Given the scale of

opposition, how is Trump still in power? How can a criminal regime—operating in open violation of the Constitution, erecting a dictatorship, and dragging the population of the world into an illegal war of aggression—continue to govern?

The answer lies in the political chasm between the anger of millions and the supposed opposition, including the Democratic Party-aligned groups (led by Indivisible) that called the protests. This was expressed most sharply in the deliberate downplaying of the war.

David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, was barred from addressing a “No Kings” rally in Nuremberg, Germany. Democratic Party operatives “would not allow me to speak and condemn the illegal war against Iran, which the Democrats support,” North noted.

At the major rallies, Democratic politicians either ignored the war entirely or reduced it to a passing phrase, because they agree with the war’s fundamental aims and accept its basic premises. In Boston, Senator Elizabeth Warren did not mention “Iran” at all, while including only a brief reference to Trump “spending \$1 billion a day to drop bombs halfway around the world.” Senator Ed Markey referred to the war only in a throwaway line.

Bernie Sanders’ remarks in Minnesota were the only comments by a major Democratic Party figure that devoted more than a sentence to the war. “We are being lied to today about the war in Iran,” Sanders declared. “Trump and his partner Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu started a war with Iran” that was “unconstitutional,” he said, because “Trump did not seek or receive authorization from Congress.” Sanders added that the war was “a violation of international law.”

But Sanders’ function is not to develop opposition to war and dictatorship, but to prevent it. He presents the war primarily as the product of Trump and Netanyahu, not as the outcome of the class interests of American imperialism and a bipartisan policy pursued for decades. He referenced the genocide in Gaza while saying nothing about the fact that it was initiated and armed under the Democratic Party and Biden, who Sanders supported. Nor did he note that the Democrats have voted repeatedly to fund Trump’s war machine.

Sanders' role was summed up in his line that "conservatives, moderates and progressives" are speaking "in unison" to end the war—an appeal not to the working class as an independent force, but an orientation to sections of the right and the Republican Party that criticize the conflict by presenting it as "Israel's war," while leaving untouched the predatory aims of American imperialism. And what does Sanders actually propose? Electoral maneuvers and voting for Democrats in November.

Millions of workers participated in the demonstrations, but they did so as individuals, not as an organized force. This expresses the role of the union bureaucracy in suppressing independent working class action, tying workers to the Democratic Party, and adapting to Trump's program. This was particularly evident in the relatively small turnout in Detroit, where the United Auto Workers under Shawn Fain has promoted Trump's "America First" nostrums.

The Minnesota rally featured speeches from AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, who did not mention war once, and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten. Without mentioning Iran, Weingarten remarked that "it's costing a billion dollars a day." Weingarten, an enthusiastic supporter of the war in Ukraine, would no doubt prefer that this money be spent for war against Russia.

Neither Schuler nor Weingarten mentioned the strike movement developing across the country. At the very moment when workers are entering into struggle in critical industries and services, the officials who claim to speak for "15 million workers" did not suggest that workers actually do anything to oppose the Trump administration or the "billionaires," outside of voting for Democrats—"No kings today and we vote in November," as Weingarten put it.

The March 28 demonstrations expressed deep and widespread opposition to the Trump administration, but this opposition is not yet guided by a clear political program. The central task is to arm it with a conscious perspective equal to the scale of the crisis. Certain fundamental points must be stressed.

First, the Trump administration is proceeding simultaneously with the escalation of war abroad and its conspiracy for dictatorship at home. Its response to mass opposition is not concessions but the intensification of repression—the obliteration of democratic rights, the normalization of police-state methods, and the preparation of ever more violent measures to silence dissent. The deployment of ICE agents in airports, which "Border Czar" Tom Homan declared Sunday would continue even after Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents start getting paid, is a test run for paramilitary deployments throughout the country.

Second, Trump's actions do not arise simply from his personal depravity. He speaks and acts as the representative of a class—the capitalist oligarchy—that is breaking with legality and democratic forms of rule in order to defend its wealth and global interests.

Third, the Democratic Party represents the same class. It differs from Trump only over tactics and presentation, while enabling the war and working systematically to divert opposition into electoral dead ends and safe channels that do not threaten the foundations of capitalist rule.

Fourth, the decisive social force that must be mobilized is the working class, organized independently of the trade union apparatus. The protests coincide with a deepening eruption of the class struggle, but this movement is being blocked and dissipated by a union bureaucracy integrated into the corporations and the state.

It is on this basis that the Socialist Equality Party intervened in the demonstrations across the United States and internationally: to advance the strategy required to transform mass anger into a movement capable of stopping war and defeating dictatorship.

The essential next step is the building of independent rank-and-file committees, rooted in workplaces and uniting workers in the United States with workers internationally against the same capitalist oligarchies and imperialist war. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) encourages the building and linking of these committees across workplaces and borders to prepare coordinated action against the war machine and the assault on democratic rights.

The SEP insists that the fight against war and dictatorship cannot be separated from the fight for socialism. The conditions that have driven millions into the streets will not be resolved through appeals to the political establishment, but only through the development of a mass social and political movement of the working class.

This requires as an urgent task the building of a leadership capable of ending the rule of the oligarchy and reorganizing society on the basis of human need, not private profit. The Socialist Equality Party calls on all workers and young people seeking a way forward to join the SEP and take up this struggle.



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