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## **A Beginning, Not an End: Hands Off What?**



Image by Marc Pell.

The numbers are coming in, and as always, the estimates vary widely. Let's just say there were more than a million people across the United States in the streets protesting the excesses of the Trump administration since January 20, 2025. Also, like always, the demands of the organizers (who went by the name Hands Off) were often transcended by the intentions of those actually attending the rallies, marches and other manifestations of discontent. Just as predictable as the speculation about the number of people in the streets are the complaints by some on the left, complaining that the protest demands were not radical enough and were just an attempt by the Democratic party to divert the growing anger of the US population.

Meanwhile, another large march was held in the streets of Washington, DC. This protest was organized by Palestinian solidarity organizations, leftist groups against US imperialism, Muslim and Jewish organizations opposed to the Israel-US genocide and occupation in Palestine and others. It's estimated that this protest involved at least a hundred thousand or

more protesters. In addition, many of the local protests organized under the auspices of the Hands Off group highlighted the US-Israeli massacre in Gaza and the West Bank. This meant that the opposition to the occupation and the repression of anti-occupation protesters was humanized and brought to the attention of thousands of US residents who previously had only the anti-Palestinian US media providing its take on the slaughter. This is a positive development, especially as the crackdown on students and others supporting an end to the Israeli occupation takes a considerably more ominous and despotic turn.

At Vermont's two largest protests—Montpelier (3000 or more) and Burlington(1000)—there was a substantial anti-genocide presence. Montpelier also had a large labor presence. However, the majority of people were liberals. Instead of disparaging the protesters, who are angry and looking for answers, we should focus our criticism on the leadership while encouraging the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist dialogue being introduced to these new protesters. Unless the left starts getting its own act together, the Democrats will turn these into a US version of the color “revolutions,” putting the neoliberals who helped get us to this point back into power. Nothing will change. The ruling class shell game will continue only with the house having better odds than at any time in US history.

The previous remark regarding the kvetching from some on the left about the liberal nature of the organizers was not meant to disparage the content of those leftists' critique. Indeed, it's quite accurate at its core. This is not unusual or unique; it does need to be addressed. Historically speaking, many if not most of the protest movements since World War Two for greater rights and economic justice in the United States have been popularized by liberals. Those that arguably weren't—the movement against the US war on Vietnam, for example—reached their peak when more liberal organizers took the reins from the leftist and radical pacifist organizers that birthed the movement. At the same time, the efforts of the liberals and the subsequent popularization of the essential demands of the civil rights movement opened space for revolutionary groups like the Black Panthers to exist and grow. Looking back, the results of this dynamic are at best, mixed. Radical organizations exist in the historical record, with some even getting the respect they deserve. However, their descendants in today's political milieu are left out of the conversation and, when they do make enough noise to be heard, they are arrested, fired from their jobs, and attacked as agents of some foreign power. This is exactly what we are seeing happen to the radical movement calling for Palestinian freedom and against the US-Israeli genocide of Palestinians.

There is a historical moment taking place. The US ruling class has exposed its fascist core. Trumpism is the manifestation of long-time right-wing dreams. Sure, it's a bit uncouth for the

more cultured on the right, but that hasn't prevented them from supporting the Trumpist executive orders designed to destroy what remains of the social welfare system in the United States. The wealthy understand that to achieve the complete power they desire, some may suffer. They intend to make sure it is not them who do. Furthermore, they believe the suffering they cause now will make them very rich later, when private endeavors run former government programs.

The role of the liberals organizing protests like those this past weekend is to save US capitalism. They may not see themselves in that role, but the objective truth says otherwise. The ruling elites represented by the Democrats believe that by keeping working people employed and benefiting from capitalism, they will continue to rule and make money. The programs the Trumpists and their right-wing allies want to cut will render such a scenario impossible. Neither sector of the ruling class can abide Palestinian freedom from occupation. Nor can either sector free itself from the war machine that US capital relies on for its plans of permanence.

The role of the radical left regarding these types of protests is to show up with our signs and our energy; to join organizing committees and coalitions and push the demands leftward. A friend in Olympia, Washington wrote on social media that the organizers there included anti-occupation activists who made the demands around Palestine and the repression of anti-occupation activists part of the program. This is a great example of how these protests can be expanded beyond the Democrats' agenda—an agenda that became obvious when NATO was one of the programs the organizers demanded Trump keep his hands off of.

Let me close with the final sentences of a recently-released pamphlet from Fomite Press: “What is needed is a popular rejection of the Trump White House and its fascism; not just one led by Democrats in the courts and the legislature. This struggle needs to be waged in the streets, the schools, the workplace and throughout the United States. It's a struggle against fascism, not a battle between the political parties of the elites.”

Onward.

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