

No Kings and far too Many Strawmen



By That Green Union Guy
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Introduction

The third “No Kings”¹ protest is now behind us. Even before it occurred, and certainly after it, sectarian critics on the left have continued to denounce it. Here are some of the more frequently heard examples (in no particular order):

- The protests are controlled opposition;
- The protests “sheepdog” or funnel the attendees (back) into the Democratic Party establishment;
- The protests are purely performative;
- The protests have no clear objectives or demands;
- The protesters are predominantly “middle class” (i.e. bourgeois) “liberals”;
- The protesters will just return to “having brunch” once the protests are over;
- Nonviolence just a form of white privilege;
- The Protests just funnel demonstrators back into electoralism;

- Protests aren’t enough; more organized, militant action is needed;
- The protests are a start, but they’ll amount to nothing without real organizing.

In truth, such arguments are nothing new. I’ve been a militant, radical organizer for well over 32 years, and I speak from experience: such claims from sectarian leftist critics of them are as stale and hackneyed as the critics accuse the mass protests of being.

Why does this keep happening? While the sectarian critics will stubbornly and obstinately claim that the reason is because their criticisms are correct and “nobody listens to them”, or “the liberals keep co-opting them”, I’m convinced the critics are dead wrong, and are stuck in a codependent feedback loop which actually makes it *harder* for them to realize the goals they allegedly seek.

¹ It could be argued that this is actually the *fourth* “No Kings” protest, because prior to the first one, held in June 2025, there was a smaller, yet significantly larger mass demonstration organized by many of the same organizations and coalitions called “Hands Off!” in April 2025. The reason for the original branding was opposition to Elon Musk and DOGE’s rapid takeover of the institutions of the administrative state, a takeover which threatened the privacy and wellbeing of millions of

Americans. Due to the toxic unpopularity of MUSK and DOGE—due, in no short measure, to these mass protests and #TeslaTakedown—Trump washed his hands of them. The organizers of “Hands Off” rapidly rebranded to “No Kings” to shift the focus onto Trump’s autocratic fantasies, so in a very real way, all four compose a single movement arc.

The Overly Liberal Use of the Word “Liberal”

Before responding to the criticisms of mass protests, I feel compelled to address the all too clichéd use of the term “liberal” (by leftists) to dismiss protests, organizations, movements, campaigns, and/or individuals) to denigrate something as being inadequate.

No doubt the term is *intended* to draw a distinction between reformist efforts (that make small changes to the existing system) and radical, i.e. *revolutionary* or *transformative* efforts (that replace the currently existing, arguably unreformable and unredeemable system with a truly ideal and effective alternative). The distinction itself presupposes that there is a discontinuity between reformist and revolutionary approaches, and that there isn’t a continuous spectrum between the two.² (The truth is more complicated, as I will later explain).

In *practice*, however, the term “liberal” is *actually* used to mean, “doesn’t conform to my rigid standards of ideological purity.” This, *itself* is a relic of dogmatic Leninism—which begat Stalinism, where ideological dissent was given zero tolerance and thoroughly crushed—though it’s often shared by other leftist ideologies, including—unfortunately—some of the more libertarian revolutionary theories, including autonomous Marxism and anarchism.

What (the modern concept³ of) “liberal” *actually* means is having the belief that the current system of government, economic order, and/or social relationships and norms are mostly ideal, but require periodic reforms and minor adjustments which can be achieved through existing means. It

² Such beliefs are considered almost axiomatic among traditional leftists, including Marxists and anarchists. History suggests otherwise, however (in fact, history shows that the line between “reform” and “revolution” is very blurry, partly because the distinction depends on what results unfold over *time*. There have been numerous examples of how supposed “revolutions” (including many that Marxists hold dear) have degraded into reformism or even reaction, and there are no shortage of examples of revolutionary changes that have unfolded that didn’t change the system, per se, but forced it to adapt to the change!)

³ There exists a distinction between this modern interpretation and *classical* liberalism, which is a belief in a minimal state (including administrative functions), and *laissez faire*, almost entirely unregulated, markets and capitalism. This is actually now called “libertarianism” in the United States, and is actually

also means that the existing body of rules and regulations are fundamentally sound, but sometimes their interpretations need to leave room for reexamination or tweaking to account for situations that weren’t initially conceived or expected.

There are, indeed, many attendees of mass protests (and a sizable percentage of their organizers) who *do* possess (this form of) “liberalist” approach to political change, and there are worthy criticisms of that limited outlook (which I wholeheartedly share), but it’s important to note the following:

1. Being “liberal” (as opposed to “radical”⁴) isn’t an innate characteristic; it’s a stage of political evolution,
2. Related to the previous: just because someone may have a limited, “liberal” (ie reformist) outlook *currently* doesn’t mean that they won’t become more radicalized over time, especially as a result of political and/or class struggle⁵;
3. Many of the attendees (and no small percentage of their organizers) of these mass protests are *not* merely, strictly “liberal” or reformist.

In truth—though many traditional leftists will argue vehemently against this—most attendees (and organizers) of these mass protests exist *somewhere on a scale between* strictly reformist and “absolutely” revolutionary, and their views are often in flux for a huge panoply of reasons and factors.

While there are *definitely* very salient critiques of liberalism and/or reformism (and some—though likely not all—apply to these mass protests), the truly effective examples are specific and nuanced,

(now) a right-wing political ideology (there was a time when such views were considered progressive, many centuries ago). This form of “liberalism” was not dichotomous with “conservatism”, as the current use of the term “liberal” is. Ironically, “libertarianism” *originally* described a type of *socialism*, essentially intended as a less inflammatory sounding way of describing *anarchism*.

⁴ The term “radical” doesn’t necessarily imply “extremist” (contrary to what many actual liberals might believe) either. It means, based on its Latin etymology, “addressing the root of the problem.”

⁵ An excellent historical example of this is Eugene V Debs, who was initially a reformist within the trade union movement, but became increasingly radicalized over time through class struggle.

applied with precision as if performing complex surgery or precision craft work. By contrast, the careless and all too frequent use of the term “liberal” has essentially devolved into a mentally lazy copout, akin to treating all problems like nails and applying a sledgehammer to them.

What’s likely motivating many on the left to dismiss such mass protests as “liberal”, i.e. ineffectual

and reformist, is bitterness and sour grapes that such mobilizations aren’t being led by their particular favored *cadre*, which as imprint of Leninist dogma that affects many leftist ideologies, whether closely related to Leninist or not. I elaborate on this in the following section.

“Controlled” Opposition or Stolen Thunder?

Claim: The protests are controlled opposition.

This is a claim that is frequently made by leftist critics of mass popular demonstrations, protests, and uprisings. The basic implication is that the more liberal (or occasionally conservative) wing of the ruling class (usually one of the two major political parties, both of whom are said—with some justification—to represent the two wings of that aforementioned class) is behind the protests to ensure that the angry masses don’t pursue a more revolutionary path—potentially resulting in the overthrow of the existing system—and are therefore safely channeled into a more reformist direction which ultimately preserves the status quo.

While such things *have* happened historically, to some extent, usually the overall picture is far more complex, dynamic, and ambiguous than the claims suggest. There is also an embedded mythology implicit in those claims: the idea that the masses, or at least the *working class*, is innately revolutionary; ready and willing to storm the proverbial barricades if given the right spark (or led by the right cadre). This claim (which has both early generation Marxist and anarchist roots and variations) is, however, mostly wishful thinking and fantasy. Indeed, it’s no more historically and factually inaccurate than the belief that most people are conservative, individualistic, and selfish (as many liberals believe).

The Marxist variant of this claim is based on the belief that (a small fraction of) the Working Class (specifically the industrial proletariat) is a privileged revolutionary agent with an “historic mission”⁶ to organize as a class and overthrow capitalism. What supposedly keeps them from *doing* so is “misleadership” from reformist elements, reactionary propaganda, and/or the absence of a revolutionary working class (often vanguardist) party. While I *agree* that such a revolution could, in many circumstances, be *desirable* (given a positive outcome), there’s little evidence to support the conclusion that it’s historically *inevitable* (given the right circumstances and conditions, at least), or requires a vanguardist party. Such arguments have an air of economic determinism about them which ultimately denies that the supposed “revolutionary agents” have their own agency (meaning they could attempt revolutionary change even *if* conditions *aren’t* “right”—and historically they often *do*, whether successful or not—just as much as they could decline to engage in revolutionary activity even if the conditions *are* ideal for them).

The anarchist variation on this belief is that most humans, particularly working-class humans, are innately revolutionary (or, “primitive”, or “wild”) until they are “tamed” by the State, capitalism, civilization, and/or technology (though not all variations of anarchism identify all of these as causes of “domestication”). This, too, is highly debatable, *particularly* when it comes to “civilization” and/or “technology”,⁷ but really it’s debatable for all

⁶ I recognize, as a dues paying Wobbly, i.e. a member of the IWW, in continuous good standing for more than three decades, that I am apparently claiming that I reject the part of the famous *Preamble* to its Constitution that reads, “...It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism,” and in truth, I *do* disagree with the words “historic mission”, because there’s nothing inevitable about it, unfortunately (it’d be nice if it *were* guaranteed). Whether the working class (or some other oppressed class) ultimately *does* somehow abolish capitalism is a matter of the decisions we choose to make. I certainly hope that we *do* abolish capitalism, because I’m thoroughly convinced that humanity (and perhaps life on Earth itself) cannot survive if we *don’t*. I’m a diehard believer in the IWW and its principles, but I’m absolutely *not* a dogmatic fundamentalist about it.

⁷ Even among anarchists, “civilization” and “technology” are debated concepts. Anarchists (of different tendencies) who seek to abolish them have various precise definitions (some of

them even well-argued and nuanced, however I might disagree with them) of what they mean, but in *my* mind, “civilization” really distills down to “social connections” and “technology” distills down to collective knowledge, tools, and practical applications of the same. Strictly speaking, many nonhuman species have “civilizations” and “technologies” in the broadest sense. Anti-technology and anti-civilization oriented anarchists will likely vehemently challenge my beliefs—claiming that I’m talking about different concepts—but I’d defend my beliefs on the following basis: life is essentially an evolutionary stage of complex chemistry; intelligence is essentially an evolutionary stage of complex life; social interaction exists within almost *all* lifeforms, and the use of tools and technologies probably represents an evolutionary stage among most, if not all, intelligent life. These tendencies are a natural outgrowth of the survival instinct. Examples of nonhuman species using “technology” in the broadest sense include beavers (who build dams), or birds

of them. There's no evidence that humans have an innate "wild" or "insurrectionary" tendency (though what there *is* ample evidence of is that humans have a very stubborn innate *libertarian* (ie libertarian-socialist) tendency, at least in the sense that they prefer to not be bossed around, even though they may be socialized to *be* bossed around or boss others around if they're privileged enough to be able to do so).

Whether or not there's actually a tendency for the industrial proletariat to favor revolutionary activity (in the absence of, or even *because* of, strong capitalist repression) if "the right cadre" leads them, or humans are innately wild and ungovernable unless domesticated by the state and capitalism (or other forces), which is less debatable, yet nevertheless not 100% certain, it doesn't change the fact that capitalism and statism are so pervasive in our modern world, most people are socialized, from a very young age, to believe that both are as inevitable as night and day. Yet, even so, most people resist the state and capitalism (to some extent) intuitively and unconsciously, even if they have swallowed the doctrines that underpin them, because so much of "civilization" (there's that *word* again), even in hyper capitalist economies or deeply authoritarian states, is actually neither capitalistic nor statist (the capitalist class and the state(s) go to great lengths to try and convince us otherwise, however.)

That's why most people, at the very basic level, oppose the injustices and forms of oppression that lead them to join mass protests (like "No Kings"). It's not because they're being led to them by misleaders; it's because they *want* to resist, but often don't know *how* to resist effectively. Yet, many of these movements develop organically. Sometimes, these movements emerge without much leadership or direction *at all*, at least initially. A perfect example of this are the "Women's Marches" that more or less self-organized (by a handful of newbies who put out a call for them on social media) in response to Trump's inauguration at the beginning of his *first* term. In January 2017, "marches" (which mostly manifested as large *gatherings*, because very little planning went into them, and some crowds were so huge that it was impossible to

quickly and spontaneously mobilize a march route) that cumulatively totaled in the low millions.

Where the "leadership" arises is often dependent upon whether or not someone steps forward and volunteers to take on the work. It's not automatically the case that the would-be leaders step forward *first* and corral the masses into their particular mobilizations, movements, or organizations, (though sometimes this happens), and it needs to be stated, that "liberals" and "reformists" don't have a monopoly on such behavior. Various Marxist tendencies are famous for ambulance chasing or entryism, and even some anarchists act thusly. In fact, what usually happens is that large movements arise in response to an *issue* or a *combination of issues*, and if the movement grows substantially large, various political tendencies will chase after it (in varying degrees of good and bad faith).

Certainly, the Democratic Party, and their adjacent supporting organizations, will opportunistically try to turn the tide of these large mobilizations to their advantage, but they're not alone in this. There are no shortage of Marxist organizations that typically try to recruit these masses into *their* organizations, and this is also true of anarchists, or heterogeneous left cause and issue-based organizations. There's nothing particularly controversial about this; it's called "organizing". While there may be more effective methodologies for organizing, recruiting from large demonstrations, protests, and marches certainly offers a huge, potential audience.

Claims that the demonstrators constitute "controlled opposition", therefore are specious. What the *actual* argument being made, as a subtext, is that the left critics (most of whom firmly believe—as their chosen doctrine pontificates—that their cadre should be *leading* these mass mobilizations, but the fact that they're *not* means that the mobilizations aren't genuinely revolutionary, because only their cadre has the "one true revolutionary program"® are either bitter that these mass mobilizations aren't being led by them, or they've attempted to lead them (or, more likely, capture the leadership of them) in the past, but their efforts have floundered.

This isn't necessarily limited to various vanguardist Marxist sects. Insurrectionary anarchists

and insects who fashion hives and nests, just to name a few examples.

often lament that the masses of demonstrators aren't sharing in their desire to use more confrontational tactics (and then said insurrectionary anarchists bitterly condemn the "peace cops", i.e. demonstration organizers for "disempowering" or "demobilizing" the masses). While the latter *has* happened on many occasions, there are sometimes good reasons for it, not the least of which is that—in the moment, at least—these "more confrontational" tactics are likely to be unstrategic and self-defeating (more about this later).

The upshot is that the reason why the masses aren't following the left critics of mass mobilizations (such as "No Kings") instead, is because either the left critics haven't done the work of organizing the masses, or the masses simply aren't buying what the left critics are selling. This is precisely what happens when individuals, organizations, and movements that become attached to their dogma stubbornly insist that they have *all* of the answers to everything. Often, they don't, and unbiased examinations of history backs this up. Logically, if these doctrines had all the answers as their adherents claim, we'd *already be living* in the ideal utopias these doctrines envision, but we're *not*.

Therefore, it's very likely that the *real* motivation behind the bitterness and dismissiveness from the sectarians stems from the latter basically expressing "sour grapes" over the fact that the proverbial "thunder" they believe should be theirs has been "stolen". They honestly believe that only *their* dogmatic program can create the revolution they

seek, and only *their* cadre is capable of leading it. History overwhelmingly says otherwise. Indeed most revolutionary uprisings happen *outside of* (and sometimes *in spite of*) these sectarians' programs and cadre leadership, but the sectarians bitterly refuse to accept this, often going to the lengths of engaging in blatantly dishonest revisionist history to "prove" the "correctness" of their point. Their denunciations of mass uprisings (such as "No Kings") is merely the latest iteration of that dynamic (I've been at this for more than three decades; believe me, I know).

There's no reason these mass uprisings cannot evolve into revolutionary movements and bring about deeply transformative changes. Of course there's no *guarantee* they will. Many don't. Whether they do or not depends on various circumstances and conditions, not the least of who participates (and, yes, who leads—though "leads" should never be confused with "*directs*" as the sectarians actually do). Most of the left sectarians don't actually believe that revolutionary self-organizing is possible, however. They aren't really complaining about the opposition being "controlled"; they're complaining about *who is doing the controlling*, and they're bitter that *it's not them*. And, because it's not them, this leads to the next big myth: the claim that these mass protests, demonstrations, marches, and uprisings are really "sheepdogging" astroturf efforts by reformist elements, specifically the Democratic Party.

From Where are the Protesters Being “Funneled” or “Sheepdogged”?

Claim: The mass protests are being organized by the Democratic Party and/or are another example of the Democrats “Sheepdogging” the masses back into the fold.

While it’s certainly true that some Democratic politicians participate in the organization of these events, and some were featured speakers, “Hands Off” and “No Kings” *aren’t* a Democratic Party organized event, nor are they specifically intended to promote the Democratic Party.

“Hands Off” and “No Kings” are, in fact, the confluence of several *different and distinct* organically organized movements and organizations, including Indivisibles, 50501, MoveOn, the Working Families Party, #TeslaTakedown, the Federal Unionist Network, various unions, some elements within DSA, and more, all of whom have been organizing a series of escalating protests and efforts independently of each other to target the fascist Trump Administration and the Trump-Musk illegal and unconstitutional fascist coup.

While many of these organizations have some varying degree of alignment with the Democratic Party (mostly out of strategic pragmatism), *none* of them are being *controlled by* the Democratic Party or the Democratic National Committee (DNC) itself. The leaders of these organizations (in as much as they even *have* centralized leadership) do *not* take their marching orders from the Party, and many of them, including especially DSA, the Working Families Party and Indivisibles are harshly critical of it.

In the case of WFP, it is actually an independent party which pursues a “fusionist” approach. The WFP believes that there currently isn’t a large enough base of voters to support a completely independent left working-class party, and I generally agree (though, unlike WFP, I am agnostic on electoralism as a strategy at best). There are currently more than 500,000 contestable political offices in the US. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) currently has approximately 100,000 members. In addition to the candidates, one must also organize a political machine in order to successfully win enough elections to achieve power.

While there is likely ideological support for a progressive alternative to the Democrats on this scale (especially if the support for Bernie Sanders is any indication), that support is still largely disorganized and needs time and effort to be built. It is far easier and more efficient, in many progressive people’s opinions at least, to pursue an inside-outside strategy rather than trying to build a new party from scratch or swamp an existing third party through mass entryism. Whether right or wrong, WFP has elected to pursue a fusionist course. While many on the left may disagree with that choice (and may have very convincing arguments for doing so), it is nevertheless incorrect to dismiss WFP as merely a “Democratic Party front”. The claims to the contrary have their roots in dogmatic Marxist sectarianism, particularly Stalinism, but also the more dogmatic strains of Leninism and Trotskyism, all of which tolerate no competition to their own doctrines and routinely dismiss competing theories and tendencies as being “counterrevolutionary”, a highly dubious notion at best.

DSA isn’t even as unambiguous as the WFP. There are many, not entirely aligned, though not entirely hostile factions *within* DSA with differing perspectives on the Democratic Party. Some advocate working entirely within the party and attempting to transform it into a socialist party; some advocate that as one prong among many, including building a socialist alternative to it in the long term; others oppose working within the Democratic Party at all, and push for a clean break from it (and within that particular faction, there are multiple, divergent views on the efficacy of mass protests, including “No Kings”); there are even DSA members who are anarchists and eschew electoralism *entirely*.

Meanwhile, Indivisibles was founded by two former Democratic Party Congressional *staffers* (Leah Greenberg and Ezra Levin) who are *critical of* the Democratic Party, and seek to make it more responsive to its voters, a process—if successful—would almost certainly necessitate a leftward shift, but also a more grassroots shift. This strategy mimics that of the Tea Party, with two exceptions:

1. The Tea Party's ideological stances were right wing and proto-fascist (though slightly less extreme than MAGA);
2. Unlike the Tea Party, Indivisible is *not* largely astroturf, in that it is *not* funded by the capitalist class (even though some of the supporters and leaders of it, but by no means the majority, qualify as petit bourgeois capitalists).

In fact, Indivisibles is a fairly decentralized movement, with hundreds of local, largely autonomous chapters, with many of them recently formed (since Trump's return to power). While many are indeed *aligned* with the Democratic Party in general, most of that skews towards the progressive wing of the party. For example, many California Indivisibles chapters have been steadily attempting to pressure Governor Gavin Newsom to take bolder positions on climate and have opposed what they believe to be concessions to fossil fuel capitalists. Nationally, Indivisibles have called for New York Senator Chuck Schumer to hand off the Senate Majority Leader role to someone else in the party as a result of his essentially capitulating on the budget fight in March (and they have reacted favorably to the news that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) could conceivably beat him in a primary election). Indeed, the organization's founders describe their strategy as "shaping the opposition". Whether that strategy is achievable or not (though there is some evidence that it actually *has* been to some extent, and could be more so if deepened), it's clearly *not* what one does when following the party's marching orders; in fact, it's quite the opposite!

As for the other organizations, Move On was indeed started by two Berkeley residents who were (Bill) Clinton supporters (they were also the creators of the "After Dark" screensaver program for Windows desktop computers, i.e. the one with the "flying toasters") in response to the Republicans making hay out of the Monica Lewinsky affair (which was a complete nothing burger), but it's not officially connected to the Clintons in any meaningful way.

#TeslaTakedown is a movement dedicated to a consumer boycott of anything financially connected to Elon Musk in response to the latter's unconstitutional and dangerous coup (which constitutes one of the largest crimes of identity theft ever commit-

ted, to put it mildly). 50501 is an organic movement that was started by a handful of individuals on Reddit (though there's some concern that it may have received seed money from campists. If that's true, the latter are definitely *not* aligned with the centrist wing of the Democratic Party!) A whole litany of other organizations from DSA to the ACLU jumped on the bandwagon as the "Hands Off" and "No Kings" movement gained momentum.

What all of these organizations have in common is not fealty to the Democratic Party, but rather angry opposition to the advice, offered by James Carville, "that the Democrats should just play dead while the Trump administration shoots itself in the foot due to its own incompetence". Such a strategy *would* constitute a strict electoral strategy with no energy focused on mass noncooperation or direct action. Carville is certainly correct that Trump and the sycophants surrounding him are largely incompetent at building their dystopian fascist order (such that they have been identified as the best organizers of the resistance that's rising against them), but it's a naive fantasy at *best* to operate under conditions typical in a normally functioning (bourgeois) democracy (and all of the organization being denounced as "liberal sheepdogs for the Democratic Party" all get this!). Trump, Musk, and the rest of the Project 2025 fascist Keystone Kops are incompetent, certainly, but they're still causing an inordinate amount of damage to the administrative state (upon which many in the working class depend for survival needs) and engaging in brutality repressive tactics (such as attempting to disappear supporters of Palestine under almost nonexistent pretexts, shooting and murdering nonviolent protesters, or starting wars of choice, i.e. in Iran).

As for the accusation of "sheepdogging" (ie shepherding the millions of rank-and-file demonstrators "into (or back into) the Democratic Party", which implies that these are essentially covert or overt Democratic Party operations to begin with), this implies that there is an organized left opposition to sheepdog them *from*. While there are certainly no small number of local or even small, albeit national, organizations and movements that exist outside and to the left of the Democratic Party (even to the left of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) and Bernie Sanders), and mass protests, mobilizations, and demonstrations that draw large numbers

of people from these groups *as well*, including even a minority fraction of whom are aligned with the very critical leftists whose arguments I'm challenging here. While there's actually no hard and fast line (despite what the sectarians claim) on what constitutes being aligned with the Democratic Party (which is, itself, not monolithic), it's a pretty sure bet that the ecosystem of groups that are willing to work with the Democratic Party (or even merely encourage people to vote for its candidates out of strategic pragmatism), is far larger than those that are rigidly opposed to the idea (which is, itself, not a precise category either)⁸, likely by a ratio of at least 100:1. In short, there's absolutely no evidence that there exists an organized movement comparable to those with at least *some* relationship with the Democratic Party (with varying degrees of adversarial stances) at least not one capable of challenging it electorally, let alone *replacing* it.

There's also little evidence to suggest that the vast majority of protesters attending these rallies aren't either *already* registered Democratic (and had no intention of changing their registration) or aren't registered as *either* Republican or Democratic (and have no intention of registering with either of those two parties). Some might even be registered as *Republicans*, and it's much more conceivable that *they* might re-register as Democrats (or even a third party). Many *will* likely vote for the Democrats in the upcoming elections, because—when it comes to electoralism—it's perceived by them as the least-worst option (however, that doesn't automatically mean they won't engage in other, far more effective forms of struggle *outside* the electoral arena, either, but more about that later...)

Several critics have pointed out that Democratic Party (and Democratic Party adjacent) politicians have been included among the featured speakers at some of the events. This is true, though it should be noted that many of the criticisms highlight the less

progressive examples, even though the majority of those featured tend to be more progressive, leaning particularly on the direction of “the Squad” or Bernie Sanders. What's often overlooked is that there are many that feature spokespersons significantly to these politicians' *left*, politically, as well as union leaders, activists, immigrants, or private citizens. This is precisely what one expects to find in a popular front.

All-or-nothing sectarians will undoubtedly regard such fronts as merely fronts for the liberal wing of the establishment, arguing instead for a *united* front of strictly *working-class* organizations and people. However, it's not so easy to strictly demarcate what is or isn't precisely “working class”, and there's no historical evidence to clearly prove that the latter is any more effective or less prone to reformism, Stalinism, or “sheepdogging”. One could also contrarily argue that it's better to have (at least some) Democratic Party politicians, including unapologetically reformist ones, trying to ride the waves of popular dissent, because it demonstrates the power of the latter (after all, if they didn't try, it'd likely signify that the protests aren't impactful enough to bother with). Whether or not the politician successfully reins in that dissent depends mostly on the dissenters. There mere *presence* of a politician at such events, or even featuring them as a speaker, doesn't in any way signify that they have any control over the mobilization *at all*.

While there may be *some* validity in arguing that these demonstrations would be more effective if they refused to allow these politicians a platform (or even invite them to speak), that has less utility than it might seem. For one thing, as I note below, there currently isn't a viable, organized left electoral alternative to the Democratic Party that's big enough or organized enough to win political power. Arguing that allowing Democratic Party candidates and politicians a platform forecloses on the possi-

⁸ A group in this latter category might include those that actively promote alternative left parties, including encouraging voters to favor them, (e.g. the Green Party), non-electoralist organizations (such as the IWW, which leaves the individual choice to its members, but publicly argues that electoralism makes little appreciable difference—which means, in practice that a lot of members don't vote in elections or just make pragmatic choices, including voting for Democratic politicians anyway as

the least worst option), or leftist parties that don't have the capacity to run their own candidates but still advocate for leftist alternatives to the Democratic Party. Within each group there are variations on what their members do, even within those with rigid, dogmatic stances on this (and other) issues. As Rebecca Solnit eloquently states it, “categories are leaky”.

bility of that happening in the future is unconvincing, because there's nothing, other than a lack of willing organizers, preventing the organization of such a party. It's also the case that one could even allow for the dictum: "keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer," meaning that giving the politicians a platform carries with it the implicit understanding that any movement that can successfully turn out *eight million* protesters can fairly easily end that politician's political career, if the latter makes themselves a political adversary.

Cynics will likely dismiss the likelihood of the protesters doing so, based on historical experience, but I wouldn't be too quick to bank on that precedent holding. There's ample evidence that the millions turning out to protest and resist Trump are quite dissatisfied with the current state of the Democratic Party. While polls that show Trump's approval rating increasingly cratering (only competing with his first term for having the lowest approval rating of any sitting president), they also show the Democrats (generically, at least) have equally or even more abysmal approval ratings. The majority of these people—and, for that matter, the majority of Americans—based on issue-based polling *consistently* register opinions on just about every issue to the *left* of the Democratic Party's stances. As for the majority of the organizations involved in organizing the protests, their views are similarly left of center and to the left of the mainstream Democrats.

The notion that these protests have served to release pressure and pacify public opinion doesn't match the facts. If anything, as the protests have continued and grown in size, the majority of people have grown *more*, not less militant, demanding more from the Democratic Party. A "sheepdogging" operation run *by* the Democrats would almost certainly try to unify people around the party's more

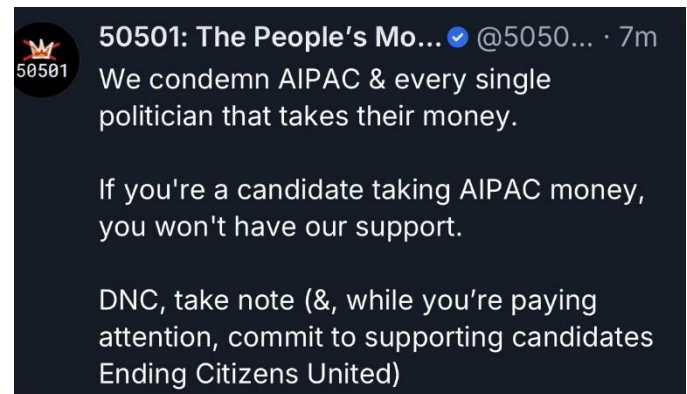
⁹ The post reads, in part: "Ezra and Leah are *not* Zionists. The rumor that they are is simply misinformation (from folks who saw and just didn't know it's not true) and disinformation (from folks who absolutely know it's not true and are being intentionally malicious/wanna keep movement fighting each other).

Receipts:

1. Indivisible came out for a ceasefire in October 2023.
2. The founders are on the record calling Gaza a genocide and have an extended record of condemning the occupation.

traditionally centrist positions, but—as the rejection of Kamala Harris in the 2024 election revealed—those are insufficient to motivate a sizable enough majority of voters. And, anyone paying attention to the consensus opinions of the demonstrators or the organizations mobilizing them, the overwhelming majority agree that the Democratic Party couldn't organize its way out of a paper bag in its current state.

Indeed, a perfect illustration of this can be given by debunking yet *another* sectarian left criticism of the organizations behind "No Kings", and that's the absurd notion that they're Zionists (meaning uncritical of Israel). This is utterly false. DSA certainly isn't. Working Families Party definitely isn't. Ash Lee Henderson from WFP has written a lengthy social media post pushing back on the claims that Indivisible founders Leah Greenberg and Ezra Levin are⁹ and 50501 has flatly denied it on their Bluesky page as well:



The fact that these organizations all flatly reject associations with AIPAC (who have been probably one of *the* most influential forces that shapes the opinions of the establishment Democrats, including establishing very clear boundaries on what is and isn't politically permissible) should serve as demonstrative proof that the Democrats have *not* been

3. They are not Zionists and have a long record of being critical of Israel, AIPAC, and the weaponization of antisemitism in America.
4. Leah serves on the board of the Diaspora Alliance, which advances the non/anti-Zionist definition of antisemitism.
5. Their organization's endorsement program explicitly bars candidates who receive AIPAC funding from consideration.
6. All of the quotes being circulated to suggest that they are Zionist are clipped from communications in 2023 where they were trying to persuade their audiences to support a ceasefire."

pulling the strings behind “No Kings”. Indeed, the fact that AIPAC is losing support among elected Democrats, as well as the majority of the party’s base suggests that the *opposite* (i.e. that “No Kings” is *succeeding* in nudging the party leftwards) is at least partially true (Israel’s genocidal campaign in Gaza, their similarly destructive attacks on Lebanon, and their role in the war against Iran have played a substantial role as well).

There exists another definition of “sheep-dogging”, of course, usually made by sectarian leftists who insist that such a descriptor applies to *any* attempt (no matter how small) to work with the Democratic Party on *any* level. Dogmatic Marxists and/or Marxist-Leninists insist that the label applies to anyone unwilling to completely break with the Democratic Party and instead explicitly work towards the organization of an independent, explicitly Marxian communist party. Meanwhile, dogmatic anarchists of most any tendency insist the label applies to anyone not eschewing electoralism altogether. Typically such all-or-nothing stances on voting for Democratic Party candidates (regardless of whether they lean right or left) corresponds to similar attitudes towards mass demonstrations, such as “No Kings”. I find both positions short sighted and self-defeating. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of people do so as well.

The biggest challenge in a complete “break” with the Democratic Party, of course, involves addressing the hard realities of an electoral system dominated by first-past-the-post-winner-takes-all voting. Such systems historically almost *always* result in the existence of two dominant parties, and the US is no exception. Historically, third parties (that eschew a fusionist approach, at least) in the US have always had limited success, either becoming dominant only if a preexisting party (such as the Whigs) implodes or having their ideas coopted by one of the already existing major parties if both are strong. Most progressive voters understand this intuitively, and because—since the early 20th century at least—the Democratic Party has been the (slightly) more progressive of the two, they have

pragmatically chosen to work within that party (often begrudgingly), because, they believe, no better *viable* alternative exists in the moment.

To be certain, alternative parties exist. I, myself, have been a registered Green Party voter more or less since 1994. The problem is that these parties never amount to much, no matter how much those arguing for “a decisive break” from the Democratic Party champion them. That’s largely because the people willing to engage in the sheer level of work needed to make these alternative parties a viable alternative simply don’t (currently) exist, and *that*, in turn, largely because those clamoring for them seem quite unwilling to *do* the work necessary to *manifest* that mass organization themselves. The dogmatic third-party adherents either judge the existing third parties as insufficiently ideologically pure themselves, they think *somebody else* should do the work because they say so, or, they want the journey of building this party to be completed upon taking the first step.

Specifically, on this last point, the third-party champions demand that the party run its own ballot line-item candidates, often especially for President of the United States, and that anything less doesn’t constitute “a decisive break”. The disadvantage of such a strategy is that—given the fact that there are over 500,000 contestable elections in the US—it would require an organization *at least* three times larger to have any chance of fully taking power (and usually it requires a party machine at least *ten* times as large to actually win any meaningful number of votes¹⁰). Simply winning a few lower offices, or even the presidency, isn’t sufficient. It’s a Pyrrhic victory indeed to win a high-profile office and yet not having any power upon doing so (and simply winning “for impact” smacks of the very “performativeness” the sectarian critics accuse the mass protests of being!)

There *are* “third party” formations that *do* seek to function as an alternative to the Democratic Party, such as the Working Families Party, but within the context of working *within* the Democratic party, because they perceive that doing so

¹⁰ As for building a party machine of at least ten times the size, 5,000,000 is *approximately* the number of those who turned out to the *first* No Kings protest. If the Green Party wanted to try and convince some of them to register for that party this would have been a *start* towards building such a political machine (and I’m certain Green Party members probably *did* at-

tempt this), but it would require much greater, sustained effort to build this into a significant alternative to the Democratic Party. Blanket condemnations of mass demonstrations (especially in light of the fact that an overwhelming majority of whom who vote at all likely mostly vote for Democratic Party candidates) are not an especially effective means for doing so.

avoids the aforementioned disadvantage. This allows the twofold option of either pushing the party leftwards (cooptation from below—something that the MAGA cult has essentially accomplished with the Republicans), or—failing that—breaking away if the party-within-the-party gains enough power and support. (In a sense, the WFP combined with others aligned with them have already reached this point, because more than 70% of surveyed Democratic voters desire the Party to shift leftwards politically). This is essentially the fusionist strategy.

The problem is that the sectarian left critics—at least those with a Marxist and/or Leninist orientation—denounce this strategy as essentially being “co-opted” by the Democrats. While this may ultimately prove to be true, there’s no hard and fast rule that says it must *inevitably* be so. If enough dedicated socialists transform the party from within (assuming enough socialists exist to do so), there’s nothing the anti-socialist gatekeepers could do to prevent it. In a sense, that is precisely what the MAGA forces have done to the Republicans from the *right*.

Now, some leftists will argue that these are apples-to-oranges comparisons, because the capitalist class *supports* (or at least enables) the far right take-over of the Republican Party (because it, at least partially, serves their class interests), but would *not* tolerate such a takeover of the Democratic Party. The problem with that argument is that it ignores the analyses laid out in *Three Way Fight: Revolutionary Politics and Antifascism*, which argues that fascism has its own internal logic distinct from capitalism (even though fascism is ul-

timately much closer to capitalism than socialism). The argument also ignores the fact that all people, and political tendencies for that matter, have agency. If a sizable enough mass organization of socialists chose to infiltrate and capture the Democratic (or Republican) party, it could be done. The real debate isn’t over the possibility, but rather the *utility*.

Meanwhile, as any anarchist will quickly point out, there’s nothing that guarantees that a “revolutionary (communist) workers’ party”, even one that conforms to Marxist-Leninist dogma, will remain true to the ideals of communism once in power, because the *state* has *its* own logic. Ultimately, a preexisting state, especially one oriented towards facilitation of a capitalist economy (as just about every bourgeois democracy is) is an organic amalgamation of social and economic relationships. Seizing control of the state apparatus itself doesn’t guarantee—and usually doesn’t involve—fundamentally changing those relationships (in fact, the record of such attempts is frankly abysmal, when one objectively looks at the historical records and factual data, stripped of ideologically revisionist bias). Grassroots organizing and strategic nonviolent tactics, on the other hand, usually *do*, however, and mass protests are one of the quickest and easiest (though admittedly not always necessarily or inevitably the most effective) methods for creating mass consciousness essentially needed to catalyze those changes.

I will now discuss why this is so in the next sections.

The Sectarian Critics (as well as many Supporters) of Mass Protests Don't Understand or Appreciate their Purpose and Function

Claim: The protests are purely performative; and the protests have no clear objectives or demands;

These two arguments arise every time a mass protest takes place, and they're usually a result of the belief that since such demonstrations don't topple the regime or economic order, or they don't fully prevent the actions that the protesters oppose (as if protesting—or anything else—could do this).

From my perspective, there seems to be commonly held misconception among far too many leftists that the “revolution”[®] must be won instantaneously, for all time, in one fell swoop or the effort is a wasted, utter failure.

Historically, of course, that has *never* happened, *even in examples that these harden left critics cite as successes*. I have lost count of the number of times a grizzled veteran of revolutionary left organizing has lamented about how, “there's no anti-war movement! If this were the Vietnam War, we'd be seeing a mass march on Washington DC right now!”

Such statements betray a profound ignorance of history, not to mention the dynamics of struggle. Nothing, and I mean *nothing* unfolds like that *ever*. Let's look closer at the Vietnam War: those mass protests these lamenters romanticize about? Those happened mostly in or after 1968. Most people believe that war began in earnest in 1965, however, in actual fact, it *really* began in the 1950s. The tension between those who wished to align with the Western bloc and those who didn't stretches all the way back to the end of World War II. While it's true that the US's heavy involvement in that war began during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, the US was trying to impose its colonialist aspirations upon the Vietnamese as soon as World War II ended (out of fear of losing out to Soviet influence). As for the first protests, these *did* take place in 1965, but as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn (who helped organize them) have thoroughly documented, these were *tiny* and not particularly well received even by those who would later embrace the antiwar movement!

The same dynamic happened with the Russian Revolution in 1917. Contrary to the romanticized notion that it took only ten days to “shake the world”, the overthrow of Russian Tsarism actually required *several* revolutionary convulsions taking place successively over a span of almost 50 years (and those involved many mass protests and even mass strikes that—if taken as one-off efforts—looked a *lot* like “failures”). Very often these involved an all too familiar dynamic of “three-steps-forward-then-two-steps-back.” This knowledge is based on Voline's *The Unknown Revolution*, admittedly a source with an anarchist bias (one which I believe to nevertheless be historically truthful) that'll make Marxist-Leninists either cringe or denounce me in a torrent of boilerplate rhetoric, but I suspect even Lenin and Trotsky would agree with the historical context, even if they would outright reject Voline's interpretation of the outcome.

Likewise the Spanish Revolution of 1936 didn't happen overnight. There had been several uprisings that had preceded it. Furthermore, for several decades, there had been a flood of trial-and-error organizing as well as both socialist and anarchist newspapers and pamphlets shared very frequently among the Spanish industrial working class and peasantry that made them very receptive to revolutionary ideas in response to Franco's fascist coup. That the latter succeeded was due to fractures and tactical mistakes that afflicted all tendencies on the left, along with the betrayal by Stalinist opportunists who, yes, cynically sheepdogged the revolution away from an incipient libertarian communism into bureaucratic state capitalism, which ultimately doomed the revolution, and allowed the fascists to smash anarchist, socialist, so-called communist (but really bourgeois), and liberal republican opposition completely.

All three of the above (whether they can ultimately be judged successes, failures, or something of each is a matter of debate, though I generally hold to the “some of each” conclusion) more or less follow the framework of strategic (mostly) nonviolence as outlined by Gene Sharp in his various writings, and as refined by Mark Engler and Paul Eng-

ler in their recent book, *This is an Uprising*. They also follow the patterns identified by Erica Chenoweth as well as the framework envisioned by Daniel Hunter of *Choose Democracy*.

Whether one shares the conclusions of any of these authors and thinkers or not, there usually *does* seem to be a common pattern in which movements always start slowly and gain momentum over time. Those that succeed in fundamentally transforming society usually do so in a combination of methodical incremental changes and sudden ruptures that make rapid changes (that address pent up demands) possible. Sometimes such currents result in revolutions, sometimes not. Sometimes the revolutions happen right under our noses but we fail to notice or acknowledge them, because our metrics of “success” are skewed.

For example, consider the Russian Revolution of 1917. It’s widely accepted that this was a hugely “successful” revolution, because it overthrew tsarism (a particularly Russian form of authoritarian monarchism) and replaced it with Communism (even if Stalinism quickly undermined it), but was it *truly* a “success”? Marxists will vehemently insist that it was, and the ultimate failure of the Soviet Union from 1989-93 cannot be blamed on inherent flaws in Marxist(-Leninist) ideology, but rather a combination indigenous (Stalin’s “hijacking” of the revolution as well as internal counterrevolutionary forces) and exogenous (constant covert and overt attempts by capitalist opponents) factors. Anarchists, including particularly Voline, argue that the failure was due to inherent flaws in Leninism that made the endogenous and exogenous forces’ ultimate success possible in the first place.

Who is correct? Based on the fact that virtually every other example of state “communist” regimes following similar paths trod by the Soviet Union, i.e. the capture of state power by ostensibly “Communist” revolutions, followed by bureaucratization and the degeneration of them into near totalitarian state capitalist caricatures of what utopian socialists envision, I’d have to go with Voline on this question. In effect, these “revolutions” ultimately change very little. Life may be *marginally* improved for the working-class masses by these “communist” regimes—even in their most degraded states—when compared to “liberal” capitalist states that make no pretenses of being communist or the

regimes that preceded the putatively “communist” successors, but it could hardly be said to be ideal, let alone utopian.

By contrast, the #MeToo movement required no capture of state power to rapidly transform society in several meaningful ways, not the least of which shook the very roots of dominant patriarchal society to its core (and to some extent is *still* shaking it as more and more revelations about the Epstein files are brought to light). While the impetus for #MeToo had been building for decades (a watershed moment involved sitting Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas—an unapologetic MAGA partisan—in 1991, but its roots reach much further back in time, though the use of the phrase “Me Too” first became popularized in 2006), it reached a point of rupture in 2017. Clearly the catalyst for this was the election of Trump in 2016, and while one could argue that his return to power in 2024 represents an utter failure of that movement, such a conclusion would be premature and erroneous.

While it’s certainly true that Trump was reelected and even received a higher percentage of women’s votes in 2024 than he did in 2020 (as well as Black male and Latino as well as young votes), this is due to more voters, particularly left leaning voters, voting for neither Trump nor Harris (or sitting the election out entirely) than in 2020, thus creating the *illusion* of a rightwards shift that doesn’t actually match political reality. As it stands, the political attitudes in matters of gender equality, gender equity, reproductive freedom, safe spaces, opposition to sexual harassment, and other issues raised by #MeToo have *not* shifted rightwards since 2017 (if anything, the *opposite* is true). What *has* happened is that those opposed to the goals of the #MeToo movement have found themselves in the minority (where they hitherto were *not*) and have grown more reactionary due to their loss of institutional privilege (a privilege that Trump and MAGA have desperately tried to restore, but only can attempt through force, since persuasion isn’t within his toolbox, let alone politically feasible). In that sense, the change is irreversible. The revolution has (partially, for now) succeeded.

Part of the problem that leads people to erroneously treat revolutions as one-off events is that few people carefully study all, or even the most significant, events that result in their occurrence. Careful

and close studies show that far from being instances where a vanguard power deposes an existing regime, many years of erosion of popular support for the status quo create the ideal conditions necessary to make such a revolution possible in the first place. Moreover, historically, old paradigms often become most repressive and brutal the closer they get to their collapse. That is because the *true* strength of any order isn't primarily manifested in *hard* power (i.e. compulsion by force), but *soft* power (compliance through persuasion). No regime, particularly authoritarian regime, is perfect, and—especially over time—the inconsistencies, contradictions, and deceptions of said regime are exposed, and it's the soft power that is most easily eroded as a result (hence the increasing repressiveness that follows). A regime cannot survive on hard power, alone, because it's both insufficient and too self-destructive. Such regimes typically collapse.

A perfect analogy for this dynamic is the melting of ice on a frozen pond. Due to water's chemical properties, its liquid state is actually denser than its solid state, so ice floats to the top. As a result, it can also melt from *below*, particularly in the Spring from solar heating. While it's a myth that frozen ponds *always* melt from the bottom up, it is true that when ice *does* melt thusly, it can still seem as though the pond is still frozen over, that is, until one tries to walk onto it. (That's why one should be always be very wary of doing so!)

A lot of profound political changes occur “below the surface”, so-to-speak. Rebecca Solnit has outlined numerous examples in her recent colorful series of short books (beginning with “Hope in the Dark”, and concluding most recently with “The Beginning Comes After the End”). The British anarchist, Colin Ward similarly observed this process unfold over his long years as a revolutionary author and editor. While nation states and governments might not change, they most certainly *evolve*, but, contrary to those who advocate evolutionary change as opposed to revolutionary change (as well as ardent critics of the latter who eschew evolutionary political change as merely a case of “plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose”¹¹), that “evolution” is of-

ten dependent upon bursts of “revolutionary” pushing from below.

This gets to the crux of the matter, and the fundamental reason why the sectarian critics misunderstand and misinterpret these mass protests: they're not *intended* to be *the* “revolution”, nor do they even make any pretense of being that. That's because *no revolution can ever be accomplished in a single stroke!*

There are actually several, intertwined purposes mass protests *actually* serve, and they include, but aren't limited to, the following:

- They allow people, particularly people previously not politically active or radicalized to gather and realize they're not isolated or alone (if they don't get past their doubts, they're not going to be going on strike or charging any barricades anytime soon);
- They allow newbies a (potential) chance to meet more experienced, and perhaps more radicalized or wiser, veterans of past struggles who can potentially provide the direction and confidence to be more effective change agents;
- They allow everyone to meet other allies and comrades they might not currently know, thus allowing them to form bonds of comradeship, which are essential for any struggle, *especially* revolutionary ones;
- They potentially allow unaffiliated individuals to plug into existing organizations and struggles (most of which have at least *some* varying degrees of relevance to the mass demonstrations);
- While such demonstrations often *don't* convince the targeted authoritarian, capitalist(s), oppressors, bosses, abusers, or regimes to change course—and that's increasingly likely to be true the more authoritarian latter are—they very much *do* undermine *support* for the target of the demonstrations by undermining, or even removing, their “pillars of support”, as is described in the “inverse triangle/pyramid” theory of power.

Indeed, this last purpose bears emphasis for two or three reasons:

having a “right-libertarian” political orientation, but in actual fact, their political orientation (when it manifests) is *left*-libertarian, according to the late Neil Peart's own statements. Sadly, Neil has gone on to the great concert hall in the great beyond. A pity.

¹¹ “The more the things change, the more they stay the same.” I can never read those words without hearing Geddy Lee from Rush singing them in both languages in the song “Circumstances”, from the band's 1978 album, *Hemispheres*. Coincidentally, Rush's lyrics have often erroneously been pegged as

1. There's *ample* evidence to support the argument that "Hands Off" and the three "No Kings" demonstrations have *done precisely that* in dramatic ways¹²;
2. Many of the left sectarian criticisms are made by Marxist tendencies that are, *themselves*, fundamentally authoritarian, and seek to ultimately place their cadre in the position of power, and so the inverse pyramid theory is an anathema to them;
3. Meanwhile, many anarchists have the opposite problem: they're trying to dismantle authoritarian power in one fell swoop, but history suggests that this is actually almost certainly impossible, because there are *numerous*, not entirely separate, but not entirely mutually inclusive—and certainly not monolithic nexuses of authoritarian power. Eliminating one can frequently result in another quickly filling the vac-

uum (which is *precisely* what happened in Spain in 1936-38).

History has taught us some rather stark and not very pleasant lessons, and one of them is that revolutionary transformative change is a never ending, ongoing *process*, not a one-off "final conflict". It's simply not fair to judge mass demonstrations as wanting, ineffectual, or inadequate, because they're merely a snapshot of a larger historical arc whose ultimate results can rarely, if ever, be divined from the moment. Where they ultimately lead depends on how people act *after* the demonstrations have concluded and what next steps get taken.

In order to address that matter, it is an essential "next step" to dismiss yet *another* pervasive sectarian myth: the mistaken notion that these mass demonstrations are entirely, or even mostly, composed of unflinchingly inert, bourgeois, "liberal" (or even "reactionary") people "who'll *never* demand, or even accept, transformative change."

¹² See: Do Protests Matter?: A timeline of the last 14 months shows how the breadth and depth of anti-Trump organizing has led to demonstrable changes. Also, why No Kings 3 is on

track to draw a record 9 million participants - <https://theconector.substack.com/p/do-protests-matter> March 18, 2026)

Chasing the Unicorn of the Ideal Revolutionary Agent

Claim: The protesters are predominantly “middle class” (i.e. bourgeois) “liberals”; The protesters will just return to “having brunch” once the protests are over; and Nonviolence just a form of white privilege:

While distinct, the three aforementioned claims are essentially variations on the same theme: the attendees of large mass protests aren't genuinely oppressed people or legitimate revolutionary agents. In truth, that claim is patently absurd.

For starters, it needs to be said: unless someone conducts a thorough, rigorous, scientifically sound sociological study of the attendees of such mass demonstrations, the critics making the claim are just talking out of their asses. It's a safe bet that none of the critics have done this. Anyone with half a brain knows full well that it's exceedingly difficult to conduct such a survey of five-to-eight million (or more) people, and random cross sections (which would almost certainly be chosen arbitrarily and hastily) won't really work, because different constituencies likely attend at different locations, and the distribution of constituencies isn't uniform. For example: there is almost a marked difference between the demographic composition of a large protest group in a major urban center (e.g. Los Angeles) than there is in a satellite demonstration in a suburb (e.g. Glendale, CA), and still further distinctions between those and protests that happen in deep rural areas or remote outposts (there was a “No Kings 3” protest in *Antarctica*, of all places).

Furthermore, the crowd “surveys” that *are* conducted by a handful of the critics that bother to try are not particularly convincing. Often, (by the critics' own admission) limited to their subjective observations (i.e. no double-blind controls or rigorous peer reviewed methodologies). At least one fairly influential leftist commentator (whom I choose not to name) based his conclusions on “reading the signs” of the demonstrators that passed through his field of vision. There's absolutely no scientific way to draw any meaningful conclusions about an indi-

vidual's class background, political perspectives, organizing experience, their willingness to engage in ongoing struggles, or risk using more militant tactics based on a sign. Anyone who claims otherwise is lying or arguing in bad faith. Meanwhile, the British polling firm, YouGov, conducted a fairly rigorous survey, which Indivisible republished¹³, and it includes some interesting data that contradicts the dismissiveness of the critics.

To some extent, some of the critics making these claims are dogmatic (though definitely not all or even most) Marxists who fetishize the industrial proletariat as being the historically privileged revolutionary agents. By extension, anyone who *isn't* an industrial factory worker (or—in some variations of the dogmatic perspective—agricultural peasant—though Marx and Lenin had rather dismissive attitudes towards the latter), are members of the middle class (or “professional managerial class”, according to more recently adopted terminology). The critics will often argue that the demonstrators predominantly represent the current (putative) base of the Democratic Party (a natural assumption that flows from the equally dubious claim that these mass protests are Democratic Party astroturf or sheepdogging efforts), i.e. better paid professionals, nonprofit directors, liberal intelligentsia, or managers with four-year (or better) college degrees.

In truth, such definitions of who is and who isn't an ideal revolutionary change agent are both at least a century out of date, and moreover, they're just wrongheaded. Going by the definition of who is eligible for membership in the IWW (any worker who isn't a boss and has no power to hire and fire), it's a safe bet that the overwhelming majority of the 5-8 million protesters are, by definition, based on their relationship to capital, working class. As for whether or not they're industrial manufacturing workers, this isn't the late 1800s anymore. The composition of the “proletariat” has changed substantially in the past 150 years.

Indeed, one major reason why it seems that a great many demonstrators (and Democratic Party

¹³ See National Survey on No Kings 3 Protests - <https://indivisible.org/news/national-survey-on-no-kings-3-protests/>

voters, for that matter) look like what have traditionally been “middle class professionals”, is that a lot of these supposedly “middle class professions” are undergoing a process of forced *proletarianization*. In plain and simple terms, a lot of what had been skilled professions (including nurses, teachers, professors, doctors, technicians, many office professions, engineers, and more) available only to an educated “elite” have been thoroughly deskilled, dumbed down, mechanized, consolidated, privatized, monetized, and “enshittified”. Indeed, that process is *essentially* a repeat of what happened to skilled craftsmen during the Industrial Revolution. The same process that drove so-called “blue collar” industrial workers to join radical class struggle movements and adopt socialism or anarchism is now driving a lot of so-called “white collar” professional workers to follow a somewhat similar course.

It’s supremely ironic that many of the sectarian critics who denounce mass protests (such as “No Kings”) because the latter supposedly eschew revolutionary class struggle tactics in favor of allegedly “performative liberalism”, turn their noses up at a new enlargement of the proletariat who just might be receptive to their fundamental principles (minus the sectarianism, dogma, and rigid doctrines, of course)! This is not surprising, because many of the sectarian left cynics continue to essentially fetishize industrial factory and building trades workers as being the inevitable spark of the revolution (with the right cadre leadership, of course.)

Some of these sectarian criticisms are the inevitable result of the tendency for radical activists to gravitate towards subcultures. To be radical is often to be on the fringes of society, both economically and culturally. It’s understandable. People who are oppressed, harassed, or even just frequently criticized by “normies” want to belong to a nurturing, inclusive community for both mutual aid and protection. There’s an earned distrust of mainstream society within those subcultures, because all too often, mainstream society tries to marginalize or even eradicate them. This is a double-edged sword, however. Subcultures, by themselves, cannot bring about revolutions. Only when mainstream society

adopts radical ideas (even if they’re not framed in precisely the same way or using the same terminology of the affected subcultures) can revolutions really occur. Like it or not, if the majority of people look like “brunch eating wine moms” rather than punk crusties, the revolution is going to be composed predominantly of the “wine moms”.

Related to this wrongheaded notion is the cynical belief that the vast majority of the protesters live a bourgeois lifestyle and will simply revert to their supposed old patterns, i.e. “having brunch”¹⁴, once the demonstration concludes. In actual fact what has happened after the previous “No Kings” protests, and indeed what happens after *most* mass protests is that attendees *do* continue their organizing efforts, activism, and struggle, *if the opportunity exists for them to do so*. Whether or not such opportunities arise depends largely on either those who organize the protests providing them, and/or other organizations utilizing the mass demonstrations to recruit willing attendees (Tim Hjersted offers a much more detailed argument in favor of doing that and how the process has worked in practice historically here (<https://timhjersted.substack.com/p/how-to-view-protests-like-an-organizer>) so I won’t attempt to rehash his arguments).

I can speak from direct experience that often both types of organizing frequently *does* happen, and that’s certainly been the case with “No Kings” (and, with all due respect to Tim Hjersted, the various organizations behind “No Kings” have been doing a *lot* more of it than he suggests, and most of it has *not* been focused on convincing people to “vote Blue (i.e. Democratic) no matter who”, or even electoralism *at all*). Indeed, following the various large protests there have been multiple follow-up webinars where the focus has been on “next steps”, and *not once* have I heard any organization behind these mass demonstrations suggest that simply showing up to those are the be-all-and-end-all. On the contrary, there has been much emphasis on long term struggle and building collective, direct democratic power (and I will elaborate on how this has manifested later in).

¹⁴ The phrase “middle-class protesters just want to return to having brunch”—often phrased as “**going back to brunch**”—originated as a critique of liberal, centrist, or “resistance” politics during the Trump administration (2017–2021). It mocks

the idea that political activism for some was merely a temporary, uncomfortable hobby, and that their ultimate goal was to return to a life of comfortable, politically disengaged consumerism.

Finally, there's yet another elephant (or donkey?) in the proverbial room, and that is the perception that the protesters are overwhelmingly white. To begin with, there's never been a scientific study conducted that conclusively proves that the vast majority of those attending mass protests, including "No Kings" are white. Even if they are, however there are several good reasons why this could be so:

- The United States still has a majority white population;
- Nonwhite, BIPOC people tend to more predominantly live in urban areas (though this is gradually shifting), and the large urban protests tend to be easier to conceive as a mass sea of humanity, whereas the whiter suburban, exurban, rural, and remote outpost protests are far more dispersed, thus the "whiteness" gets exaggerated;
- BIPOC people face a much greater risk of repression due to institutionalized systemic racism historically, and therefore they're more hesitant to attend even these large protests, in spite of the fact that the risk to them (due to the protests' size) may actually be far less than they realize;
- The repression that large protests such as "No Kings" opposes is much newer to white people than it is to BIPOC folks, and the latter have been organizing for much longer and have actually highly developed forms of nonviolent resistance that doesn't always manifest as traditional protest methods (for example: Jazz music, and later, Hip Hop, are actually forms of *cultural* protest).

It shouldn't be lost on anyone that just about *everyone* protesting, white people included, are motivated, at least partly, by *opposition to* white supremacy (which is inherent in MAGA), racism, ICE, crackdowns and attacks on immigrants, the genocide being carried out by the Israeli government, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and other op-

pressive divisive tools used by authoritarians to divide-and-conquer and consolidate their power. It's also a safe bet that many of the demonstrators, white people particularly, are far from consistent or perfect in such opposition, but that's to be expected and understood as part of the painful process of unlearning the oppression they are trying to oppose, which is systemic learned behavior. Such imperfections aren't above (constructive) criticism, and not everyone is likely to be willing to embrace the reality that unlearning and dismantling white supremacy (in favor of multiracial, multicultural democracy) is a never-ending ongoing process, but one shouldn't condemn mass demonstrations because of such imperfections. It should be taken as a hopeful sign that the *potential* to win the vast majority of white people over to dismantling white supremacy manifests in "No Kings" and other such mass demonstrations.¹⁵

Finally, as for the claim that strategic nonviolence is a form of "middle class white privilege", there's a huge degree of historical irony embedded in that argument. Strategic nonviolence was *actually* largely pioneered by BIPOC organizers (such as Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr) in the late 19th and first two thirds of the 20th Centuries, and only became mainstream among white organizers in the last third of the 20th Century. Ironically, the alternative to strategic nonviolence (i.e. armed revolution) that is counterposed is predominantly historically the province of *white* revolutionaries (and although the latter used a fair amount of nonviolent tactics as well, somehow it's the violent tactics that are romanticized and given the credit).

Furthermore, while there *are* undoubtedly historical examples of privileged white activists precluding the use of more militant (but nonetheless arguably nonviolent) tactics, more often than not in my experience, such claims are actually overstated cases. Typically what occurs are disagreements between experienced organizers with longer game, patient strategic approaches and those with a more "go for broke" mentality. History clearly demonstrates the folly in the insisting upon

¹⁵ There *are* of course, Afro-pessimistic perspectives that argue such hopes range from unlikely to hopeless. While I understand such views, I don't share them (though, to be fair, I am "white", but I'm also Jewish, so my life-experience is mixed. Antisemitism exists, still, but one would be hard pressed to offer demonstrative proof that

Jews are treated as "subhuman" everywhere). In any case, if the Afro-pessimists are justified in their views, a claim that only history can demonstrate, then there's likely no alternative to mass demonstrations that would offer better outcomes.

the latter approach. Certainly there are instances when it pays off—at least temporarily, though the success rate of what follows is mixed at best—but most of the time the costs outweigh the benefits. Those that favor the “go for broke” approach tend to be those who harbor the romantic notion of the masses just waiting for the appropriate match to be stricken to begin the riot to end all riots. Unfortunately, most of those “matches” just result in self-inflicted charred hands.¹⁶

There seems to be a persistent view that the most forceful and (putatively) most militant tactics are automatically the most effective tactics, meaning that they’re the ones most likely to result in the desired outcomes, but reality is more complex. First of all, more forceful tactics generally carry with them a higher failure and backlash risk, especially if they’re used too early in a campaign. Secondly, fewer people are willing, at least initially, to risk them, and winning isn’t simply a matter of sufficient *militancy*, but also sufficient *numerical strength*. It’s certainly true that if eight million people were to engage in a general strike, it’d be impactful, but in spite of the seemingly large mass that number represents, unless they’re concentrated in key economic leverage points, eight million nevertheless represents approximately 1/10% of the human population, and most large metropolises have approximately that amount of people living on them. The eight million that protested on March 28, 2026 did so on multiple *continents*.

That’s not to suggest that either a general strike is unachievable or that a mass demonstration of 8 million people engaging in far less militant tactics aren’t effective at chipping away at authoritarian power. Quite the opposite is demonstrably true in

both cases, though a global general strike is *incredibly* difficult to pull off (and has never been attempted, let alone achieved, even though their adherents, including myself, argue for building towards one), and a demonstration of eight million not up to the same militancy of a general strike, can nevertheless provide the beginnings of a foundation for greater militancy. Historically speaking, great changes can occur, and often do *without* even a hint of a general strike in the immediate future.

A good analogy for this dynamic is a chess game. Far too many inexperienced players discount the utility of their pawns, preferring to quickly exercise their more powerful pieces, particularly the very powerful queen. Furthermore, they tend to use their pieces as individual weapons, moving them carelessly and aimlessly, thinking that this gives them an advantage. Any experienced chess player, even one who isn’t a tournament level player knows, however—often through painful experience—that pawns are actually “the soul of chess”, and that used effectively as a unit, can often make all the difference in who wins the game ultimately. They may seem limited and insignificant, especially as individual units, but together they can be an unbreakable force, even if their “strength” seems limited. And certainly the more powerful pieces do the lion’s share of the damage to the opposing player, but only if used effectively in combination with the pawns and each other, and then only if used at the appropriate instance.¹⁷

In any case, the historical evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that strategic nonviolence is more effective than violence, regardless of who engages in it, regardless of class status or skin color.

¹⁶ This is not a new debate either. Careful and thorough reading of history shows that many revolutionaries, including most anarchists, who exhibited vehemently adventurist, insurrectionary tendencies in their youths ultimately evolved to favor more measured—though no less revolutionary—organized, collective and class-based approaches, including syndicalism. Abel Paz’s very thorough history of Bonaventura Durruti offers a very good illustration of one such revolutionary’s evolution from bank robber to rank-and-file CNTista.

¹⁷ Chess is admittedly an imperfect analogy, since struggles against authoritarian and capitalist power blocks are, by defini-

tion, asymmetrical (though one can think of the “weapons of the (so-called) weak” as existing in the aggregate that can resemble those of the more (putatively) “powerful” oppressor), the rules of the real world far more complex and dynamic, and there are often far more than a mere two “sides” with shifting and not always either mutually inclusive or exclusive congruencies. Nevertheless, chess is an excellent—though by no means the only—game for teaching both strategy and patience. I sincerely wish more revolutionaries would learn to play chess. In my opinion, far too many apparently prefer seeing the struggle as a game of “Rock-‘em-Sock-‘em-Robots.”

Thy Doth Protest the Protests too Much

Claim: The Protests just funnel demonstrators back into electoralism; Protests aren't enough; more organized, militant action is needed; and the protests are a start, but they'll amount to nothing without real organizing.

These and many other similar claims made about mass mobilizations and protests such as “No Kings” are frequently made, and widely shared and believed among many sectarian left critics, but they're based on at least three misconceptions:

1. The protests are meant to be the be-all-and-end-all;
2. The organizers of the protests don't have and don't advocate steps beyond them; and
3. Revolutions are won in single strokes, rather than ongoing sustained struggles.

None of these are true, just as none of the claims made about what the protests do or are *intended* to do are entirely (or even partially, in some cases) true.

Mass demonstrations have a fairly well researched history, and a good summary of them in the US can be found in the book, *How to Read a Protest*, by L. A. Kauffman. The book begins with a concise, yet thorough, account of the March on Washington, organized in 1963, followed by shorter comparative accounts of the mass marches of similar size that followed up to and including the Women's Marches that activists pulled together at the start of the first Trump presidency in early 2017.

While many of the boilerplate criticisms made of contemporary mass demonstrations (such as “No Kings”) don't actually apply, they *do* much more closely apply to the March on Washington, but even then, only to a partial extent. That particular march *was* tightly controlled by its organizers. All of the signs were mass produced, all of the slogans displayed by marchers had to be preapproved, and the speeches delivered by the speakers toned down

(which is ironic, given the historical fact that this is when and where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech). While the purpose of the march wasn't to funnel its participants into electoralism, it most certainly *was* “an appeal to authority” (in this particular case, the John F Kennedy Jr Administration and the then Congress) to pass civil rights legislation. However, lest one think the march constituted “sheepdogging” its participants into the Democratic Party, its organizers consisted chiefly of black civil rights organizations (running the gamut from black churches to Marxist in their orientation), and white leftists, *particularly* many with Marxist-Leninist tendencies.¹⁸

Most of the mass demonstrations that have followed the March on Washington have not been so timid or tightly controlled. Messages are usually up to the participants, speeches are often less controlled or timid, and the goals have been far more varied. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, *none* of these mass demonstrations, including the March on Washington, were *ever* intended as an end in themselves. The notion that the organizers of such events harbor the fantasy that their plan is to turn out 100,000s or 1,000,000s which will then induce the powers that be to “see the light” is romantic myth, often encouraged by the popular entertainment industry (which is notoriously adept at watering down history).

The purpose of mass demonstrations are multi-faceted, and they include the any or all of the following purposes (among others), in no particular order:

- They allow people to actively protest unpopular policies, actions, decisions, or regimes publicly and visibly;
- They let those attending see (often quite dramatically) that they are not alone, and that their views are shared, quite even possibly by a popular majority;
- They provide people a chance to overcome their fears and hesitations, discover their collective

¹⁸ There were criticisms from the New Left denouncing its too-down nature, the lack of freedom, and its timid demands, but the counterposed suggestions from the critics mostly were

mass demonstrations that would've essentially resembled “No Kings”!

strength and power, and take proactive steps instead of just passive acceptance;

- They create potential spaces for networking, building connections, joining existing groups and movements, and taking steps towards more active, or even more militant, tactics and organizing;
- They potentially reveal to others, particularly those not yet ready to attend such demonstrations that they can overcome their fears and hesitations;
- They undermine the illusion of popular support or political mandates for the regime being protested, thus making it easier to remove the latter's "pillars of support".

Having attended many of the "No Kings" organizing meetings (which are accessible to anyone wishing to attend them if they have internet access), I can attest to the fact that the organizers are quite cognizant of the fact that such demonstrations aren't ends in themselves. The organizers are keenly aware that they're not, by themselves, sufficient to remove Trump from power, that more militant (albeit nonviolent) tactics will be necessary, that electoral solutions aren't enough, that the struggle will require sustained effort, and that all of the above requires diligent, methodical organizing.

Having closely followed the organizing efforts behind "Hands Off" and "No Kings", in my experience the organizers have never *discouraged* participation in more militant organizing. They've routinely supported the community defense and direct actions against ICE and Trump's attempts to militarize predominantly black and brown urban centers. They've held webinars on building mutual aid networks. They've encouraged people to help build the organization necessary to support a general strike (including the January 23, 2026 strike in Minneapolis). They're not hesitant about supporting organized labor, climate action, or antiwar protests either (in spite of inane, sectarian memes asking why "No Kings" doesn't support such things, which also answer in a sneering and snarkily dismissive—not to mention utterly inaccurate—tone, "because Democrats support none of these things").

The sectarian left critics are either ignorant or deliberately arguing in bad faith, however. Here are some examples that prove this is so.

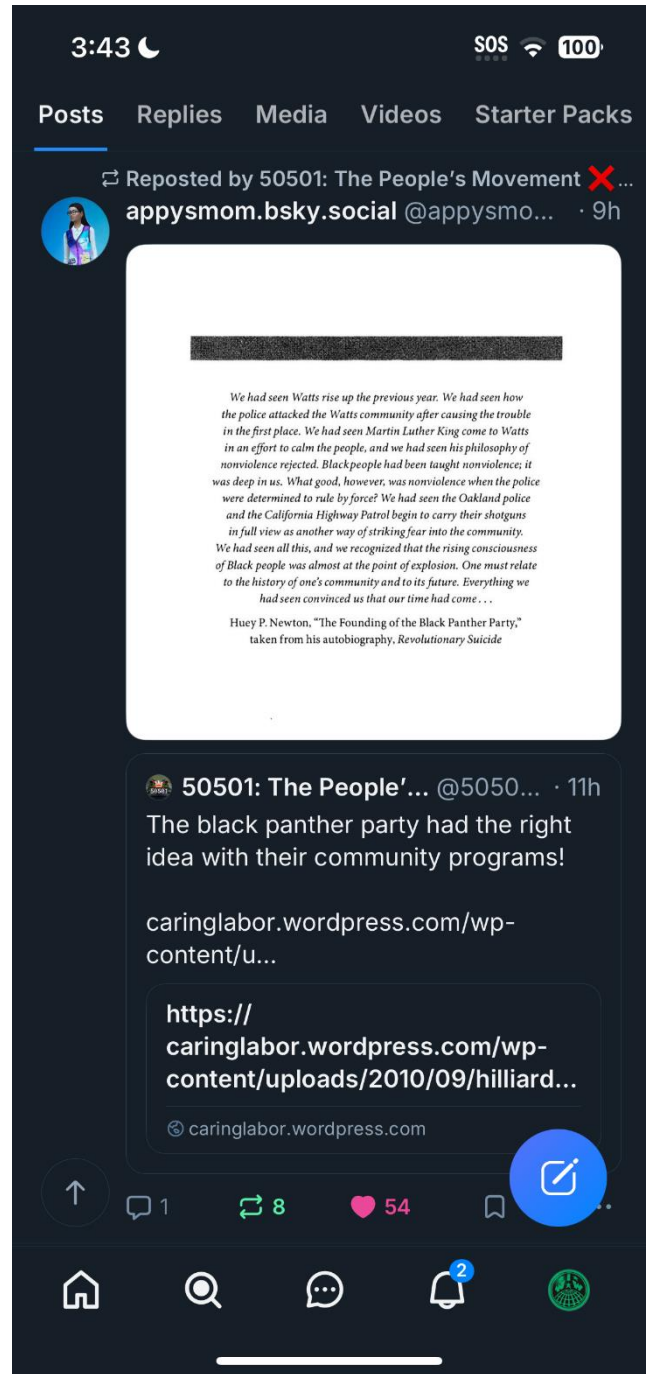
Here is a screenshot of Indivisible urging people to join in the 2026 May Day actions:



Here is a screenshot of Indivisible stating, quite unequivocally, their opposition to Trump's war of choice in Iran, and why "No Kings" implicitly includes opposition to such things:



Here is a screenshot of 50501's Bluesky page speaking favorably of the (Marxist-Leninist) Black Panther Party's breakfast program (an example of mutual aid in practice):



Here is another 50501 Bluesky screenshot of a post with a link to a favorable video on anarchism that explains what it is and what it isn't (in response to Trump trying to stoke fears about it):



Here is yet another 50501 Bluesky screenshot encouraging people to form local organizations and mutual aid networks:



Do these examples suggest that either 50501 or Indivisible have *fully embraced* Marxist-Leninism or

libertarian communism? Hardly. Yet, it *does* indicate that they're at least *open to* elements of them, and furthermore, even if they've not fully embraced either revolutionary theory doesn't automatically make either 50501 or Indivisible strictly "reformist" either. What it also indicates, is that the aforementioned organizations aren't convinced that either Marxist-Leninists or anarchists have *all of the answers* to the questions we face, even if they might have *some* of them.

"But, but, but, the organizers behind 'No Kings' still encourage the participants to vote for the Democrats!" many of the critics say, thus lending credence to the claim that such demonstrations ultimately funnel people back into electoralism, particularly favoring the Democratic Party. Strictly and technically speaking, that's true, but it's not as sinister as the critics make this sound, for the following reasons:

1. The overwhelming majority of protesters are likely to favor the Democrats anyway, and the only question for them, relevant to that context anyway, is whether to vote or not;
2. There's no law of nature that says that if someone chooses to vote in an election (including voting for Democratic Party candidates) this somehow abrogates or precludes them from also engaging in more militant actions (including mutual aid, strikes, or other forms of direct action);
3. There's no evidence that anyone advocating third parties, including registering marches participants to vote for those parties, have been excluded;
4. While it might seem tempting to argue that massive demonstrations that can mobilize as many as eight million demonstrators could simply move on to the seemingly logical step of breaking from the Democratic Party and forming a new, left / workers' party (or joining an existing third party en masse) that's a *lot* more easily said than done, and eight million is far short of the minimum size of the political machine necessary to make such a party viable.¹⁹

¹⁹ Reiterating what I said earlier, to build a party machine and voting base capable of contesting 500,000 political races would require *at least* a tenfold minimum (5,000,000), but really a *hundredfold* (50,000,000) is probably necessary. Sure, a political machine at the minimum threshold of that range could mo-

bilize the large number at the other end of that range, but it would take time and sustained effort. Furthermore, keep in mind that the demonstrators were spread out over at least 3300 locations, so building the networks necessary to coordinate all of that activity would take time.

Given the above, the main reason why the organizers of mass demonstrations encourage—well, to be more accurate, they don't *discourage*—electoralism, particularly relying on the Democratic Party as the main vehicle, is that it's simply the only organized force (flawed though it may be) that currently *exists*. This is the main problem with doctrinaire, sectarian left rhetoric, namely that those who utter it either aren't actually serious about practicing what they preach and organizing it, or they simply *don't know how to count!*

Just because the vast majority of participants in mass demonstrations, such as “No Kings” opt to vote Democrat, doesn't necessarily mean that these demonstrations are ultimately responsible for that choice (and claims to the contrary are an example of trying to prove *causation* due to *correlation*). While one cannot be fully certain without conducting a rigorous, scientific survey of the participants of mass demonstrations, there's no conclusive evidence that the millions of participants aren't open to more progressive or revolutionary alternatives to the Democratic Party, or electoralism entirely. Most likely they're favorable to a “both/and” approach rather than an all-or-nothing, “either/or” dichotomy.

What holds this back is the perception—which is likely a sensible one—that the alternatives just aren't currently viable enough. If, for example, the Green Party were viable enough to be the third major party (if such a thing were possible in an electoral system that seems to favor two), there's a good chance that a sizable portion, if not the majority, of demonstrators, not to mention the organizers, would probably welcome it or even advocate supporting it. The fact is that the Green Party can't even field enough candidates to seriously challenge the two major parties for power, let alone muster more than 5% of the vote. As stated previously, issue-based polling clearly shows that the vast majority of voters are to the *left* of the Democrats on most issues (but don't necessarily vote accordingly). Historically, however, people generally don't vote for theoretical choices; they vote for candidates they think can *win*. If that weren't the case then we'd see much higher vote percentages for alternative par-

ties, based on the high dissatisfaction with the two major parties that we know exists.

Another factor that holds this back among the majority of the demonstrators is that it's a case of asking for too much, too soon. Sectarian left critics (particularly, but not limited to, anarchists with an especially insurrectionist approach) frequently struggle with the fact that, while there are arguably more effective tactics than mass demonstrations for achieving revolutionary, progressive, or even limited reformist goals, *most people just aren't ready to take them yet*. It's asking a lot of someone who's never even protested peacefully, or rarely done so, to immediately charge the proverbial barricades.

While this is often dismissed as the product of a bourgeois, pampered, and privileged upbringing, that, too is a gross generalization. In some cases, the proverbial “shoe” comfortably “fits” (though even then, one shouldn't be too hasty to dismiss the individual's revolutionary potential. One has only to consider anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin's princely background!), but in most cases it actually *doesn't*. Most working people fear the risk of losing one's jobs or livelihoods even if being arrested for civil disobedience. Others have legitimate fears of negative consequences as well. Any experienced union organizer, even those with an anarcho-syndicalist orientation, deeply understands that there is an often tedious, but necessary, process of building up confidence among individual workers as well as collective cohesion and solidarity among the workplace or industry before one can take even early direct-action steps (such as a “march on the boss”), let alone the ultimate step (a mass general strike). Only a naïve and impatient fool believes that someone can simply march into a workplace, call a general strike, and usher in a workers' paradise. Even Ralph Chaplin (who wrote the lyrics to *Solidarity Forever* and created Sabocat, the IWW black cat mascot) says as much in his pamphlet on *The General Strike*.²⁰

The root of the problem seems to be that sectarian leftists either aren't serious about organizing, don't know how to count, or haven't studied history very carefully. There's little doubt that militant actions can often be more effective than symbolic ones or electoralism. There's also ample evidence to

²⁰ <https://www.greenunionism.org/archives/IWW/ChaplinGS>

suggest that building counter institutions that are locally based and democratically (i.e. through direct, rather than representative democracy) controlled ultimately yield better results than relying on the state, let alone trying to somehow “capture” it (unless you’re a capitalist or authoritarian yourself). The challenge is that doing the more effective things successfully are *so much more easily said than done*, requiring far greater sustained effort and much vaster numbers than anything even the organizers of “No Kings” (to say nothing of the far tinier sectarian group-lets) can realistically muster, at least presently.

Building these better alternatives take *time*, and what’s more, they require *sustained effort* (I can speak from personal experience having been involved in the IWW for more than three decades). Sectarian leftists will often protest and cite examples of history where general strikes, insurrections, and revolutions have seemingly been organized in much shorter timespans, sometimes involving far fewer numbers than the “No Kings” protests, but these are ahistorical romanticized revisionist accounts of history. Most such accounts are incomplete, selectively biased, and include no shortage of omissions and inaccuracies.²¹ When one looks carefully at these historical ruptures, they’ll often find that they’re merely one snapshot in a far longer and far more complicated historical arc. That arc includes many mass demonstrations that, at least accounting for historical evolution, include mass popular protests and demonstrations not all that dissimilar than “No Kings”.²²

As for workers and the working class being much more militant than they currently are in days of yore, that’s arguably true, but also a case of tunnel vision. Yes, workers were more militant, but *that’s primarily due to the fact that they were much more regularly and harshly repressed* than they currently are. One must remember that many

of the rights and freedoms that workers, as well as working class people generally, *still* currently possess (in spite of *some*, though by no means total, authoritarian backsliding), *didn’t yet exist* yet then, but were won precisely due to that militant struggle. Even, then, however, such militancy was not something that spontaneously and instantaneously burst forth out of nothing. It took *decades* of struggle, trial and error, and experimentation before the working class learned how to be effective in the moment (and even then they still had many failures and defeats; history tends to gloss over this). Even the IWW and CNT weren’t created out of whole cloth, and themselves were the coalescing of many experienced, veteran organizers’ experiences.

There’s no guarantee, of course, that mass mobilizations, such as “No Kings” will evolve in a revolutionary direction, but then there’s no compelling reason why it *couldn’t*. Even the IWW, CNT, and the Bolsheviks—all of which were formed after years and decades of historical confluences—had humble beginnings (and sometimes ignoble ends, as was the case with the Bolsheviks). There was no guarantee they’d go as far as they did *either*. Most revolutionary events, movements, and organizations grow from seeds, and few, if any, can accurately predict which will survive. Case in point: while many Marxist-Leninists *still* insist that the 1917 Soviet Revolution (at least before it was corrupted “by Stalin”) was the ultimate realization of Marx’s vision, Marx, himself, and many of his contemporaries and fellow communists were bearish (pun not intended) on the possibility that a predominantly agrarian, mostly preindustrial nation, such as Russia, would be the wellspring of such an occurrence!

Given all of the arguments against the many claims made by the sectarian left sectarian left critics of “No Kings” (and similar mass popular uprisings and mobilizations) that I have offered,

²¹ Furthermore, they constitute “apples to oranges” comparisons. Objective conditions in 2026 are nothing like they were in 1968, 1959, 1936, 1917, 1905, or any other year from centuries past (thinking otherwise is yet *another* pathology of those who claim that their favorite doctrines are based on infallible universal truths). For example technology has evolved significantly, there are far larger populations in most nations, the number of issues that concern people have grown, and the tools available for challenging existing regimes have also grown, in spite of new technologies allowing ruling regimes from having more tools for surveillance and repression at their disposal. Plus—though sectarian leftists, particularly Marxists, are loathe

to admit it—history has demonstrated, quite starkly, that putative “revolutions” that supposedly unfold according to the revolutionist’s chosen playbook (though it’s debatable whether they actually do, or ever realistically could) almost universally either fall far short of the mark, are quickly smashed, or degrade into their reactionary opposites, not in *spite* of the revolutionary leadership, but precisely *because* of it, and most non true-believers fully know this.

²² Ironically, *that* pattern seems to be true *in spite of the fact* that they can represent “apples to oranges” comparisons.

why is it that they keep spouting them, then? I will conclude with some hypotheses that I think answer that question quite well.

...Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing

I assert that I have thoroughly debunked and disproven the arguments made by the sectarian left critics of mass mobilizations. Now I will offer my opinion on why I think these criticisms, many of which are boilerplate rhetoric that is often prewritten (and trotted out ad nauseum for every such mass mobilization), stubbornly persist in spite of the misconceptions they perpetuate.

I will grant that most of the claims are repeated (some might say, “regurgitated”) with honest intentions. By this, I mean that while they’re conveniently “prepackaged” arguments that are clichéd and hackneyed (and all too readily available), there are myriad revolutionaries who repeat them (without fully grasping their origins) in more or less good faith because they honestly *believe* they’re making a salient, cogent criticism of the perceived limitations of what they deem to be “liberal” and/or “reformist” approaches (which they think includes most mass marches, protests, demonstrations, and mobilizations). What motivates them to utilize these all-too-readily available boilerplate arguments is often a lack of historical background, inexperience, naïveté, or frustration with the seemingly glacial progress (if any “progress” is unfolding at all) of change.

As someone with a revolutionary outlook, I sympathize especially with this last point, but in actual fact, *much* progress *has* been made, in no small measure due to popular uprisings and steadfast organizing, even though it often seems otherwise. That is partly due to the fact that revolutionaries use what could arguably be described as a very faulty metric of success. Much of the old, traditional Western left still holds fast to the notion that “the” revolution will be one, grand, final conflict, after which “the *Internationale* will be the human race.” Anything short of this constitutes a failure. This, too, is largely due to the romanticization of Marx and Lenin and the assumption that they had all the answers to everything (history says otherwise, however). In a very real sense, this romanticized revolution is analogous to a sports championship, in which the outcome of the game settles history for all time.

Reality is markedly different, however. What’s “revolutionary” today might actually be *reactionary* a century hence. For example, were you to invent a time machine and successfully transport yourself to the 1940s, you might be shocked to discover just how ignorant and unenlightened the revolutionary socialists of that time will seem to you on matters of energy, ecology, and industrialism (not to mention gender, misogyny, ableism, veganism, eugenics, indigenous sovereignty, and a whole range of other issues). While not monolithic, their perspectives might make today’s ecomodernists seem like primitivists by comparison. Meanwhile, they’d almost certainly find our views on such things to constitute some form of utopian infantile leftism and completely unrealistic.

The old left concept of the revolution as a one-off simply doesn’t square with either history or reality. In fact, revolution really just represents sudden spurts of *evolution*. Recognizing that truth doesn’t mean that revolutionaries are misguided in advocating revolutionary change. Quite the contrary; that pushing is essential in making those sudden spurts happen. Rebecca Solnit, Dávid Graeber, Mark Engler and Paul Engler, and many others have documented how this dynamic pervades our history. People typically organize around issues, and sometimes they win, either by dismantling systems of oppression and enshrining their newly won rights into existing bodies of law, or by changing societal norms so much so that those that oppose such changes in favor of previous norms lack the political and social power to turn back the clock. The ruling regimes may not actually change, but how they operate *does*. That’s not an argument for liberalism or passively assuming that evolution will take its course. Indeed, it’s an argument *for* continued revolutionary organizing.

What frustrates leftists, particularly old traditional leftists, is that this process is ongoing, yet inconsistent and nonlinear. There are ebbs and flows, fits and starts, and, yes, periods of rollback and backlash where progress is reversed (and that is usually the result of elites recovering from the shock of their power eroding, getting organized, and retrenching, but it’s also undoubtedly some-

times the result of revolutionaries overplaying their hands and alienating their base, such that conservative or even reactionary ideas can be legitimized, especially if organized reactionary groups are prepared to weaponize the cynicism of the masses). History is *full* of “three-steps-forward-two-steps-back”²³ changes. These dynamics are understandably very frustrating, and they breed pessimistic and cynical attitudes, particularly towards efforts to struggle against the regress or even insufficiently rapid enough progress. Wouldn't it be nice if we could solve all of our problems in an instant? Boilerplate rhetoric provides conveniently available—albeit usually inaccurate—explanations that spare the critic of the uncomfortable work of self-reflection and soul searching that is often a necessary part of learning and growth.

But, if these are boilerplate rhetorical opinions (that are repeated in fits of ignorance or mental laziness by well meaning, but frustrated activists), who are the *sources* of them? I think the answer is pretty obvious: they are the product of dogmatic leftist organizations, some of which could arguably and accurately described as cults who are deeply threatened by the likelihood that these mass movements will rob them of a chance to recruit more followers. Either that, or they firmly believe in the vanguardist model of organizing, and they firmly believe that *they* are historically predestined to be that vanguard. Such attitudes are deeply ingrained in Leninist and/or Trotskyist doctrine, though there are a lot of roots for that in Marx's and Engels' source material. This explains why dogmatic leftism bears an uncanny resemblance to right wing religious fundamentalism.

²³ I've lost count of how many times I've said this only to receive the response, “well, I feel like it's 'one-step-forward-ten-steps-back!'”, and it's *always* phrased that way, almost as if these responses are quoting some influencer that uttered such a quip. A close look at history will show just how wrongheaded that view—which is often that of those who are either inexperienced or have thoroughly unrealistic expectations of reality—is. There absolutely *zero* evidence to support the belief that public opinion and societal norms (on just about any issue you can name) have substantially regressed among the majority of people *at all*, let alone *by that much*. The perception is partly an illusion created by the fact that societal norms have shifted substantially *leftwards* (at least socially), but the modern state *has not kept pace with that shift*. The hyperbole in the response is really just a frustration with the hard truth that there is no scenario in which we'll win a revolution that'll settle history for all time, and then life will be a never-ending Bacchanalia. That's a

One should also bear in mind the historical record of dogmatic vanguardist leftists once they acquire state power. It's not particularly benign. Indeed, typically one of the three following things happens:

1. They'll govern as social democrats and enact social democratic reforms;
2. They'll eschew their radical positions and govern as neoliberals;
3. They'll govern as authoritarian state capitalists, and their positions will be not particularly distinct from fascism.

Alternatively, they'll use two or all three of the aforementioned approaches at different times. There are precisely zero historical examples of dogmatic vanguardist leftists obtaining state power and subsequently dismantling said power structures and replacing them with bottom-up democratic socialism. Even if the desire and the intent to do so is there, the anti-authoritarian position (which is inclusive of, but not limited to, anarchism, i.e. libertarian socialism) is that this cannot be achieved through top-down methods. This was a very hard lesson the anarcho-syndicalists learned in the Spanish Revolution of 1936.²⁴

Of course, it's theoretically *possible* that in some imaginary future scenario, a vanguardist revolutionary group could obtain state power (through any number of means), with mass popular support, and faithfully transform the state and economy into a democratic paradise, but this has never happened historically, and it would be an absolute miracle if it did, for reasons I've already stated. That's not to suggest that a left-wing politician cannot be elected and make a good faith effort to aggressively enact

naïve fantasy. That's not to suggest that everything everywhere inevitably gradually gets better; clearly it doesn't, but things regress most quickly when people give in to cynicism and stop trying.

²⁴ There are some anarchists who insist otherwise, i.e. they believe that the FAI-CNT could have seized the state and instantaneously dissolved it by decree. I find this hypothetical scenario (which has never been tested historically) extremely unlikely, and the argument dubious. While dyed-in-the-wool anarchists *would* likely be more sincere in their dedication to doing so, simply issuing a decree that declares, “the State is hereby dissolved”, wouldn't magically eliminate all of the existing social relationships that enable the hitherto existing state. Nor, for that matter, would such a decree eliminate all of the power blocs that might attempt seizure of the state through a (likely armed) coup.

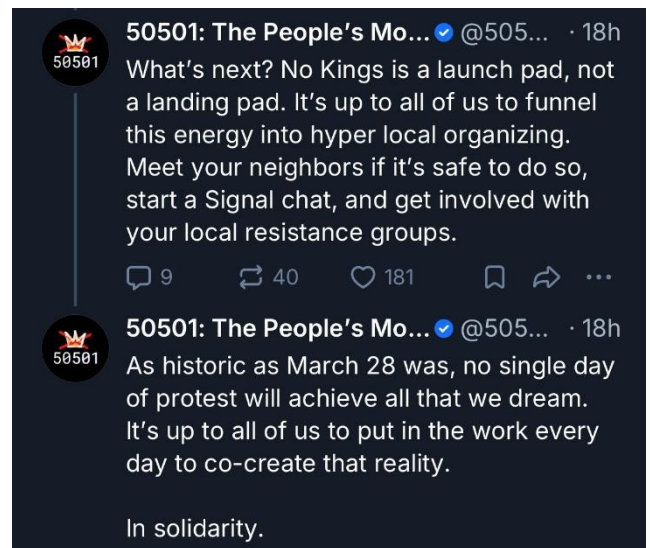
popular reforms; they almost certainly can. However, those reforms will be met with institutional resistance, roadblocks to their implementation, and aggressive propagandizing against them (in order to undermine popular support for them). With few exceptions²⁵, those who are critical of mass mobilizations due to the latter's perceived lack of revolutionary acumen are likely to be just as harsh in their judgment of the elected official(s) attempting the popular reforms in good faith, because the reforms "don't go far enough" or "aren't being implemented swiftly enough".

No matter *what* happens or *who* might be elected, regardless of their professed political positions, chances are good they won't live up to all, or even most, of their promises and positions. Removing entrenched power blocs using state power is rarely easy or without peril. The general remedy in those circumstances is essentially the same as in the case of an authoritarian: popular, democratic pressure, manifested in a multitude of ways, depending on the specific case. That might include mass noncompliance, strikes, or mass demonstrations (like "No Kings"). The ability to wield power depends on the willingness of the people to allow it. And, yes, this means that the struggle to achieve "utopia" will be a never-ending quest, and one would do well to remember that this was Thomas More's original intent in *proposing* it in the *first place*.

It is certainly true that some methods of resistance are more effective than others. The overwhelming historical evidence shows that nonviolent methods are more effective than violent alternatives. It is true that an organized working class, willing to engage in economic disruption, is a better defense against authoritarianism (as well as a more effective inducement to ensure that supposedly progressive elected officials honor their obligations) than *not* having one. This is a point that Erica Chenoweth, herself, has made: democratic states that experience authoritarian backsliding have a 50% chance of having that backsliding reversed if faced with mass nonviolent resistance. That per-

centage increases to approximately 83% if it includes active participation by organized labor.

Obviously, given the above, if there were general strikes called by the workers in response to authoritarian backsliding, or called proactively to push for progressive changes, they'd be highly effective, certainly more so than mere mass demonstrations. The problem is: the ability to do so requires *far greater* organization among the working class in most countries than currently exists. Certainly, we should be *building* that capacity (and most, if not all, of the organizations behind "No Kings" would heartily agree as this screenshot shows:



...but doing so is far more easily said than done. It requires sustained effort and time. It's far too easy to proverbially rub the noses of those who cannot magically speak that capacity into existence (and don't try to make the pretense that they can) in shit, and rarely do those that do actually make the effort.

Many of the critics will retort by arguing that "reformism" (by which they mean just about every method that doesn't conform to their standards, whether it's actually reformist or not), hasn't worked in the past odd number of years. Genuine reformism probably hasn't, as they say, but as I have previously argued, what constitutes "reformism" and what constitutes "transformative" (i.e. *revolutionary*) aren't entirely solid categories with

²⁵ These exceptions usually involve cases where the politician in question is politically associated with the group making the exceptions, often for sycophantic reasons: e.g. the politician remains immensely popular (even though their attempts to enact popular reforms are being met with resistance), and the sycophantic

group retains some benefit—such as name recognition which helps recruit new members or followers—from the continuing association. It's unfortunate, but true, that there is no shortage of such political opportunism, and the so-called revolutionary "left" isn't immune to it.

clear and unambiguous distinctions. It's also true that during those same years, the purists have had ample opportunity to try and organize their alternatives. Have they done so?

The critics would earn more credibility if they could demonstrate the ability to mobilize equal or larger numbers of people to actually engage in their more ideologically pure, more militant efforts they're evidently demanding. So far they've not done so. Like the old saying goes, "the proof is in the pudding."²⁶ Likewise, these sectarian left critics would have more credibility if their own ideal alternatives had a better historical record than they actually do. Most so-called "communist" states have been anything but (indeed, most resemble the fascist authoritarianism and state capitalism that "No Kings" opposes). Most anarchist uprisings have failed to dismantle the state. The truth is that *nobody* has proven that they have an ideal, revolutionary solution, and it's arrogant to denounce others as mere "liberal reformism" simply because they don't follow some ideal model.

None of this guarantees that mass demonstrations, such as "No Kings" will live up to whatever revolutionary potential it may possess. Whether it does or doesn't depends on the actions of those who participate. If it's true (as it certainly is in specific cases) that the principal organizers of mass demonstrations have at least some reformist tendencies (though that is often dependent upon the body of rank and file demonstrators and their willingness to push for more radical demands), it's probably more effective to participate in such efforts and push them in more revolutionary directions (as long as those "directions" aren't merely following historically faulty paths). There are varying ways to do this, some more effective than others. A complete discussion on that is beyond the scope of this already lengthy treatise. I will say from experience, however, that one of the *least* effective ways to accomplish this involves attending organizing meetings and browbeating the organizers for their "counterrevolutionary running-dog lackey" tendencies.

That said, there are certainly salient and content critiques to be made of mass demonstrations generally, as well as specific such critiques to be made of mass mobilizations and popular uprisings. These critiques are often heard by the organizers. The latter sometimes respond to them and adjust their course accordingly, and sometimes they do not. Their willingness to do so likely depends on whether or not those making the criticisms have sufficient credibility. If the critiques are shared by a wide swath of those participating in them, the organizers are likely to listen to them (or else they won't have a movement to organize!) Such critiques are likely to be taken more seriously by the majority of the participants if they're based on factual information and made in good faith. Thus far, there's been little evidence that any of the (sectarian) leftist critiques meet that standard. Indeed, they have been—to paraphrase Shakespeare—"a tale told by idiots, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

²⁶ I'm frequently amused that some critics will imply, if not outright argue, that the millions of people who attend these marches lack any revolutionary potential whatsoever. One is left wondering who they imagine might take their place (as if

there is some vast untapped reserve of revolutionary working-class people who'd magically flock to the beck and call of the "right" revolutionary vanguard if it appeared).