

# Protesting Trump - “The kernels of several new movements”

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Protests against Donald Trump have been mushrooming since his inauguration on January 20 – particularly in the USA itself but also internationally. The reaction here in Britain has been particularly extensive with participation in the women’s marches and actions against Trump’s Muslim ban reaching into parts of Britain that demonstrations, particularly on international questions don’t often reach. Susan Pashkoff and Veronica Fagan celebrate the growth of these new resistances and look at some of the issues the movements will need to confront:

The reaction against Trump in the US and in Britain is extremely broad; cutting across class, ethnicity and religious background, involving liberals as well as the left. Demonstrations, including the very powerful women’s marches on January 21 [\[1\]](#), are primarily made up of younger people, many attending their first march. Due to their breadth and the persistence of the actions we can say that movements are being born or reborn– given that there is not only one movement that is involved. There are important overlaps – both in personnel and demands – but the women’s movement, the environmental movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, the indigenous movements, the LGBTIQ movements and many trade unionists (especially in the public services) are all active around their own demands .



Many of the actions are organised on social media and spread also by word of mouth. Spontaneous demonstrations are a great expression of anger and disgust at Trump’s Executive Orders and they give people a chance to unite to protest. But, there are potential dangers ahead. Because they are spontaneous, there is a strong possibility that this reaction may sputter out – although as long as Trump continues in the same vein; that probably will not happen soon.

There is a danger of protest burn-out and it can become difficult to maintain the level of opposition. Indications are that the demos are spreading out rather than constricting at this point; although it feels like a long time, Trump has only been President since January 20. But the tactics need serious

thought – as soon as numbers begin to drop, the media will have the movements dead and buried.

Trump has removed the injunctions against the Keystone pipeline and the Dakota Access Pipeline – it has since come out that he has money invested in the latter. The North Dakota house have passed a range of bills supporting the pipeline – one of which legalises the driving of cars at the protectors. Native Americans have been at the centre of defending the land and the water. These movements need further support both financially and with bodies to help out.

There are new targets ahead – and new moves to bring out people not normally at the centre of street mobilisations – with a march for science being organised for April 22, Earth Day [2]. The call is very general, but it's extremely likely that the foci will be support for women's right to control our bodies and absolutely centrally opposition to climate change. It currently looks like this will be followed a week later by a peoples march against climate change on April 29 but the situation remains fluid.

The anger that is bringing people on to the streets needs to be harnessed but there is a danger in the US that these nascent movements get subsumed to the Democratic Party – something which has led to the death or at least neutering of many important social movements in the US previously. Social movements need to be autonomous from political parties in order to be able to fulfil their role of mobilising the maximum numbers around a particular cause.

## **Brexit and Trump**

In Britain, many activists see the link between Brexit and Trump; the way a shift to the right in the advanced capitalist world is evidenced by the election of Trump and Brexit. Pushing hard against Theresa the Appeaser May, who rushed to proffer a state visit to Trump as part of her “closer relationship” with the US, is vital. Opposing her on this issue also exposes her plans for a hard Brexit. We see who her friends are with her dictator shuttle, first to Trump and then to Erdogan in Turkey to shore up trading partners – and then of course welcoming Israel's Netanyahu here in Britain. All of these regimes are in blatant breach of international humanitarian law and human rights.

Though the debate has currently shifted to the House of Commons with Speaker Bercow's strong intervention against Trump being invited to address the House – and his statement that opposition to racism and sexism, as well as opposition to the Muslim travel ban, are central to this stance – there are important questions facing the movement as a whole.

Here the Labour Party does not have a tradition of trying to take over movements in order to neutralise their radical edge as the US Democrats do – rather the danger has been that Labour doesn't organise on the streets at all. With Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, there has been some positive change in the situation. Many Labour members have participated in the actions against Trump but the Labour Party as such has not been very visible in the protests – though Momentum has been more so. Corbyn himself has been very clear on the question of a visit from Trump; not only opposing a state visit, and more recently supporting Bercow against Tory attacks, but saying that he should not be let into the country at all if the travel ban remains in place.

A further problem for the movement against Trump in Britain was whipped up last week by journalist and commentator Owen Jones. He tweeted that he would not be taking part in the demonstration on February 4 “because of the leading role of the SWP in it, a cult which covered up rape”. Others [3] who have a long role of protesting against the way the SWP dealt with this question have pointed out that to their knowledge this is the first time anyone has suggested that

people not attend a demonstration rather than a meeting or conference. Far from undermining the SWP for rape apology it undercuts Jones's own credibility – and more damagingly divides and diminishes the vital movement against Trump.

It is vital that the next protests, called in fact by the Stop Trump coalition (in which the SWP is not involved, while Jones together with many other organisations and individuals are, for February 20, is another rousing success.

## Illegal ban

Trump's Muslim Ban has been branded as illegal [4] by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as by several judges in the US itself after the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) moved quickly to file motions to get an injunction. Even Dick Cheney and John McCain have come out against it. Given that it will be proved illegal –both unconstitutional and in opposition to international law, why are they doing it?

It seems to be partly that they want to gauge the scale of the opposition – and see where their potential opponents are, as well as to demonstrate that this President would uphold his campaign promises. Of course there are other linked campaign promises such as the Muslim registry (which is illegal according to the Constitution in the Establishment clause which forbids the establishment of a state religion and prevents discrimination based on religious beliefs). This has widespread opposition and even mainstream Jewish groups are urging members to sign up in protest.

Trump's conversation with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull about the agreement [5] made by Obama to take 1250 refugees from an Australian detention centre [6], whom Trump described as "illegal immigrants" shows a complete disregard for respect for international responsibility for refugees.

As part of his offensive against migrants, Trump is also attacking Sanctuary cities and states [7] (e.g., Oregon). Various cities and states grant sanctuary to migrants [8]; Birmingham Alabama has just voted to join them [9]. Trump has said that if they continue, they will lose federal financing. New York City mayor Bill Di Blasio, who has otherwise been somewhat of a disappointment, has been sending emails that the city will not back down, irrespective of loss of funds. This resistance needs to be supported. Sanctuary for migrants has historically been provided by churches when they have been threatened, with the second wave occurring under GW Bush. This growing movement also needs backing [10].

On February 2, a scheduled speech by Breitbart editor Milo Yiannopoulos at UC Berkeley had to be cancelled due to protests [11] leading to Trump saying he will cut funds to the University [12]. The funding that Berkeley receives from the federal government comes under research grants and student aid, so it would be difficult to stop, though this may be part of a general strategy to undermine government-funded research and to undermine students from lower incomes families.

But Trump is also threatening the University of California system in order to support "free speech" by his fascist buddies. Clearly in his world, free speech is only reserved to him and his supporters. Again, Trump has come to the defence of Breitbart news (formerly owned by his right-hand man, Steve Bannon) who of course have been consistent supporters. Yiannaopolous's planned speech at UCLA was also cancelled by the Bruin Republican Club [13], supposedly due to his demands, but most probably due to fears of demonstrations like those at Berkeley.

There have been interesting discussions about punching Nazis and fascists in the US following the

punching of Richard Spencer on camera at Trump's inauguration. In Portland, on February 2, four young fascists with megaphones came to the airport to disrupt the demonstration in opposition to Trump's ban. Demonstrators surrounded them and moved them out of the central demo; there was an altercation and one of the fascist was punched unconscious. Security at the airport did not intervene until afterwards.

## **Weak Democrats**

Democratic Party members in Congress have done little to block Trump's nominees, with even some of the progressive caucus are voting for them. Both Elizabeth Warren and Sherrod Brown voted to support Ben Carson for example. 13 Democratic senators even voted against Bernie Sanders amendment in support of cheaper prescription drugs; desperately needed especially now the senate has repealed the ACA. The leader of the Democrats in the Senate, New York Senator, Chuck Schumer, is not organising a vote against the nominees or even filibuster them. Mobilisations have occurred in New York State to put pressure on Chuck Schumer [\[14\]](#), but this has led to few positive results to slow down the pace of confirmation of Trump's picks. The only thing he needed to do was to try to filibuster those that were truly unqualified for the posts they were being put forward for - and most of the nominees fit into this category - or those whose beliefs (both religious and political) were so extreme that they represent a threat to those offices (e.g., Betsy DeVos in Education and Scott Pruitt in the EPA). Following a 24 hour filibuster by Senate Democrats to delay her appointment, Betsy DeVos's confirmation required Vice President Mike Pence to cast the deciding vote in the Senate [\[15\]](#). Following this confirmation, NYC High School and University Students walked out of their classes in protest of both her confirmation as Education Secretary and in opposition to the Muslim Ban in a protest organised on social media [\[16\]](#).

Trump has appointed a Supreme Court nominee (Neil Gorsuch) and there are reports that the Dems are not planning to filibuster him. He is said to follow Antonin Scalia, whom he is set to replace, in the perspective relating to "what did the founders mean" as the basis for decisions [\[17\]](#). He will probably be as dangerous for abortion rights, civil rights as Scalia and also is holding a free market perspective economically.

Trump can put out whatever executive orders he wants; the only thing that Congress can do is refuse to fund them. So, in terms of the wall, they can say we will not finance it. But what is the probability that they will?. Trump has come up with a funding possibility which is this idea of a 20% tariff on goods from Mexico to fund it; but whether this applies to only final consumption goods or intermediate products as well, this will be passed onto consumers who will be paying the taxes on these goods. Moreover, unless NAFTA is repealed [\[18\]](#), he cannot do this nor can he stop travel to and from Mexico completely.

## **Conclusion**

We are living in very interesting times.

Theresa May's desperation for trading partners in the face of a hard Brexit has forced her to align with regimes whose policies are violating international law which theoretically should undermine her legitimacy. Whether it will is another story. But the need to link the votes for Brexit and Trump and their relation to years of austerity, job loss and the destruction of workers' livelihoods, working conditions in the face of rising income and wealth inequality due to neoliberal economic policies by mainstream political parties has led us to where we are.

The wonderful responses to Trump's various decrees (aka Executive Orders) range from legal challenges, the revival of the sanctuary movement to protect immigrants, to spontaneous protests conducted by various movements. This response contains the kernels of several new movements which must be autonomous of political parties. It is not only opposition to Trump's policies, but feelings of international solidarity which has motivated so many people living outside the US to stand in support of protesters against the attacks on women, against the Muslim ban, and also in solidarity with the Water Protectors against the Dakota Pipeline. It is almost breath taking.

## Socialist Resistance

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## P.S.

\* February 9, 2017. Socialist Resistance:  
<http://socialistresistance.org/protesting-trump/9647>

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## Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 40095), [January 21 Women's Marches: Are we witnessing a moment or a movement?](#).

[2] ESSF (article 40370), [April 22, 2017: March for Science on Earth Day - An international movement.](#)

[3] <http://www.leninology.co.uk/2017/02/hard-arguments.html>

[4] <http://www.businessinsider.fr/uk/un-human-rights-chief-trumps-immigration-ban-is-illegal-and-mean-spirited-2017-1/>

[5] [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/02/heres-what-the-dumb-deal-on-refugees-with-australia-actually-says/?tid=a\\_inl&utm\\_term=.4839eca1de7f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/02/heres-what-the-dumb-deal-on-refugees-with-australia-actually-says/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.4839eca1de7f)

[6] [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/no-gday-mate-on-call-with-australian-pm-trump-badgers-and-brags/2017/02/01/88a3bfb0-e8bf-11e6-80c2-30e57e57e05d\\_story.html?postshare=8841485998611574&tid=ss\\_fb&utm\\_term=.89bebf9e2b1b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/no-gday-mate-on-call-with-australian-pm-trump-badgers-and-brags/2017/02/01/88a3bfb0-e8bf-11e6-80c2-30e57e57e05d_story.html?postshare=8841485998611574&tid=ss_fb&utm_term=.89bebf9e2b1b)

[7] <http://abcnews.go.com>

[8] <http://www.ajc.com/news/national/what-are-sanctuary-cities-here-list-sanctuary-cities-counties-states/Y452wnIOx2hemgKx8T4gIP/>

[9] <http://www.wbrc.com/story/34390802/birmingham-city-council-passes-sanctuary-city-resolution>

[10] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/27/undocumented-immigrations-us-churches-sanctuary-trump>

- [11] <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/protests-violence-prompts-uc-berkeley-cancel-milo-yi-annopoulos-event-n715711>
- [12] <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-california-ucberkeley-protests-idUSKBN15H1R5>
- [13] [http://laist.com/2017/01/24/ucla\\_milo\\_canceled.php](http://laist.com/2017/01/24/ucla_milo_canceled.php)
- [14] <https://buffalonews.com/2017/01/31/schumer-takes-hard-line-trump-nominees-not-hard-gillibrand/>
- [15] <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/02/07/us/politics/betsy-devos-confirmation-vote.html>
- [16] <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/manhattan/hundreds-nyc-students-walk-class-trump-protest-article-1.2966742>
- [17] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-38818482?SThisFB>
- [18] <http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2017/01/27/memo-to-trump-20-mexican-import-tariff-means-americans-pay-for-the-wall/#3e65913f557a>