

Taking action against authoritarianism

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Last Saturday, in small towns, suburbs and cities across America, more than 5 million people turned out against growing authoritarianism to show what democracy looks like—peaceful, passionate and people-powered. No Kings Day appears to be the largest day of protest in United States history.

From Pentwater, Mich., where 400 of the town's 800 residents marched, to the 50,000 protesters in Portland, Ore., to the "cradle of liberty"—Philadelphia—where I joined an estimated 150,000 demonstrators, millions of people stood up to say: *We will not stand by while democracy is dismantled.*

Even in Minnesota, where state officials urged people not to attend planned protests after deadly political violence erupted before dawn, an estimated 30,000 showed up at the state Capitol.

Amid a sea of American flags, protesters carried signs showing the diversity of this grassroots movement. They marched to say no to autocracy. They marched for their kids' public schools and their right to learn honest history. They marched against cuts to nutrition and health programs for people in need—cuts made to give even more tax breaks to the wealthy. They marched to condemn immigration raids on laborers seeking work, seamstresses at their sewing machines and students heading to school. And they marched because the United States is a democracy, not a monarchy.

In Beaufort, N.C., Ray Carter, a World War II veteran who fought in the Battle of Okinawa, held a handmade sign that read: "I fought fascism in 1945! At 102, I am doing it again!"

Adriana Orozco said she attended the rally in Milwaukee for her parents, who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico 30 years ago. Her sign said, "Criminals don't wake up at 5 in the morning to go to work."

In my hometown of New York, teachers carried signs with slogans like "Stop Wreaking Havoc on Public Education" and "Monarchs are so 1775! XO XO, A history teacher."

Retired Maj. Gen. Randy Manner spoke to thousands of protesters in Alexandria, Va., saying that the Army "does not exist to protect power, and it must never, ever be used to intimidate or silence the very people it was created to defend."

As I spoke at the flagship march in Philadelphia, the social studies teacher in me came out. I reminded the crowd that our founders said no to kings and no to tyranny almost 250 years ago because of the same values we hold dear today: the desire for liberty, opportunity and freedom from fear.

Indeed, we have much to fear in ways that were unimaginable not long ago. Trump has taken a militaristic approach in Los Angeles, deploying the National Guard and Marines to police Americans against the wishes of elected leaders, and he is threatening to expand into more cities he views as opposing his policies. Federal agents, often masked and without badges, uniforms or warrants, have snatched people off the streets. Democratic lawmakers have been physically restrained, handcuffed and even arrested while attempting to represent their constituents. And then there's the horrific, politically motivated assassination of a beloved Minnesota legislator and her husband and the attempted murder of another legislator and his wife, who is an AFT member.

These are not isolated incidents. They are part of a rising wave of political violence, fueled by authoritarian rhetoric, dehumanization and division. And they are exactly why we need a mass movement committed to nonviolence, dignity and the defense of our democratic values.

President Donald Trump had very different designs for June 14. He presided over a military parade commemorating the Army's 250th anniversary, which coincided with his 79th birthday. The contrast between Trump's parade and the people's protests was striking:

Tanks rumbled past eerily quiet and mostly empty viewing stands in Washington, D.C., while spirited crowds amassed at statehouses, on bridges and in town squares. The many patriotic displays at No Kings protests pierced Trump's claim that the protesters are "people that hate our country." To the contrary, the No Kings demonstrations showed that Americans won't let anyone take our cherished democracy away.

Protesters showed what democracy looks like—peaceful, passionate and people-powered.

This is a grassroots movement with a big tent. The AFT and hundreds of our affiliates were all-hands-on-deck for No Kings Day, in partnership with Indivisible, 50501, the American Civil Liberties Union, National Action Network, the Interfaith Alliance, and veterans who have defended democracy abroad and are now defending it here at home. No Kings Day showed the power of the people—power we must keep exercising. Whether you live in a red, blue or purple state, there is a role for Americans from all walks of life to take a stand. We will keep fighting for opportunity for all, dignity for all and a democracy that works for all. Join us.



Weingarten, second from left, at the June 14 No Kings rally in Philadelphia.

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