

What the New York primary victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez means

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Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, defeated the fourth-ranking member of the Democratic leadership of the House of Representatives, Congressman Joseph Crowley, in Tuesday's primary election in the 14th Congressional District of New York.

There is no doubt that the vote for Ocasio-Cortez reflects the mounting opposition in the working class to the corporate-controlled politics of both the Democratic and Republican parties. There is a growing radicalization among working people, powerfully expressed in the wave of teachers' strikes earlier this year and now seen in the broad opposition to the Trump administration's persecution of immigrants.

The defeat of Crowley demonstrates the popular hostility towards the Democratic Party establishment. In a district with a population of more than 700,000, where the incumbent won 83 percent of the vote in 2016, a leader of the congressional Democrats received barely 11,000 votes. Given its outlay of \$3.4 million (according to the Federal Election Commission), the Crowley campaign spent more than \$300 for each vote.

Despite the repudiation of Crowley, however, the politics of Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA offer no way forward for the working class. There is not a hint of socialism in her program (the word itself does not appear on her web site), and both the candidate and the DSA have sought to downplay their connection. Anyone who suggests that her victory marks a shift to the left by the Democratic Party should be told, in no uncertain terms: Curb your enthusiasm!

The DSA is not fighting for socialism, but to strengthen the Democratic Party, one of the two main capitalist parties in the United States, which shares responsibility with the Republican Party for all the crimes committed by American imperialism around the world and against the working class at home.

Ocasio-Cortez ran on a program that combined bargain-basement populism—Crowley takes money from corporations and real estate interests, Crowley lives in the Washington

suburbs and doesn't understand the problems of the working people who live in Queens and the Bronx—with support for the Democratic Party as an institution.

In her first post-election interview on CNN, Ocasio-Cortez affirmed her undying loyalty to the Democratic Party, declaring, "I'm proud to be a Democrat. I was raised in a Democratic family, with Democratic values." She has stated that her main goal is to help the Democrats recapture control of the House of Representatives in the November midterm election.

One might ask, in response to such political boilerplate, what in Ocasio-Cortez's 28 years of life has the Democratic Party done to deserve such loyalty? What are the great achievements of the Democratic Party in that period of time: The abolition of welfare? The deregulation of the financial system? The bombing of Serbia? The bailout of Wall Street? The slashing of wages for autoworkers? Drone-missile warfare? The destruction of Syria, Libya, Yemen and other countries? The build-up of NSA spying? More deportations than in any other period in US history?

Ocasio-Cortez does not address such questions. Instead, she has committed herself to support "without question" whomever the Democratic Party nominates in 2020 to run against President Trump, including a corporate Democrat like Hillary Clinton or the junior senator from New York Kirsten Gillibrand. While declining to declare at this moment her support for Nancy Pelosi as the leader of the House Democrats, she said, "It's entirely possible to support her."

Ocasio-Cortez embraced the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's tactic of running conservative candidates in so-called "swing" districts, including dozens of candidates drawn from the military and intelligence agencies. But she advocates selecting more liberal candidates, like herself, in "safe" districts like the Fourteenth.

The program offered by Ocasio-Cortez is a considerably watered-down version of the program on which Bernie Sanders ran in 2016: single-payer health care, a federal jobs

guarantee, free college tuition, a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. Like Sanders, she avoids all foreign policy issues, saying nothing about the ongoing US-backed wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen, or the campaign of drone-missile assassinations launched by Obama and continued by Trump.

She calls for the abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—currently a popular slogan given the horrific scenes of children being ripped away from their parents—but she does not advocate the abolition of the CIA torture machine, the Pentagon’s Special Forces assassins, or the National Security Agency, which spies on the communications of all Americans.

Even in relation to the border, Ocasio-Cortez said in her CNN interview that ICE would have to be replaced with “a humane agency,” because, “We do need to make sure that our borders are secure.”

The widely circulated campaign video narrated by the candidate falsely presents her as a typical young woman of the working class for whom “going into politics wasn’t in the plan.” Actually, Ocasio-Cortez was groomed for a career in Democratic Party politics. As soon as she graduated from Boston University, she was recruited to work in the office of Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy. Then, after a few years running a business start-up in the Bronx, she became a full-time organizer for the Sanders presidential campaign, laying the groundwork for her successful run for a congressional seat.

Her campaign sought to combine invocations of identity politics—Crowley is 56, white and male, Ocasio-Cortez is 28, Hispanic and female—with a broader appeal to a district that is largely working class but very mixed racially, and with a huge immigrant population. In her campaign video and other materials, Ocasio-Cortez invariably describes herself as “working class” and claims to defend the interests of working people against corporate influence.

But using the term “working class” is by no means the same thing as advocating a program that meets the needs of workers. In class terms, she represents a section of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly Hispanic businessmen and political operatives who have been excluded from their “fair share” by the more powerful Wall Street interests that dominate the Democratic Party. She says nothing at all about the most fundamental question facing humanity, the mounting threat of imperialist war fought with nuclear weapons.

Ocasio-Cortez is a bourgeois politician, not a socialist. She does not question the economic foundations of capitalist society—the ownership of the banks and giant corporations by a financial aristocracy. She does not suggest that the property system in America or the accumulation of unheard-of wealth by a tiny fraction of the population should be questioned, let alone ended.

There’s not a hint in her politics of industrial democracy or workers’ rights in the workplace. There is not even Sanders’ verbal condemnation—as phony as it is—of the billionaires, many of whom, in New York City, are Democrats. At best, hers is a mildly reformist program that would have been entirely unexceptional in the Democratic Party of 1965.

And even these piddling reforms are predicated on an absurdity: the reform of the Democratic Party, one of the two political instruments through which the financial oligarchy rules America—a party that has moved drastically to the right over the past half-century.

This is the essential perspective of the Democratic Socialists of America. The DSA seeks to build a somewhat broader base for the Democratic Party, the historical graveyard of all movements from below that have sought to challenge American imperialism. It seeks to put a progressive face on this right-wing party in order to block any independent challenge by the working class to the entire framework of corporate power.

The Socialist Equality Party fights to mobilize the working class through the building of a new, mass political movement completely independent of the Democratic Party and capitalist politics as a whole. Whether in support of striking teachers, or fighting for the freedom of immigrants persecuted by the Trump administration, or in the electoral arena, the SEP continuously warns that working people cannot take a single step forward without breaking free of the straitjacket of the corporate-controlled two-party system.

The SEP is running Niles Niemuth for Congress in Michigan on a program diametrically opposed to the pro-capitalist politics of the pseudo-left DSA. The Ocasio-Cortez campaign is not a step towards the liberation of the working class from capitalist politics, but an effort to create a political roadblock to the building of the genuinely independent movement of the working class based on a socialist and antiwar program that is represented by the SEP.



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