

# The Democratic Socialists of America: Providing a “left” cover for a right-wing Democratic Party

Patrick Martin  
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Under conditions where the Democratic Party is openly aligned with the CIA, FBI and other national-security agencies in a McCarthyite campaign, charging the Trump White House with being an outpost of the Kremlin, the pseudo-left group Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is seeking to provide a “left” cover.

Leading Democrats and their media apologists have sought to use the June 26 primary victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a DSA member who defeated incumbent Democratic Representative Joseph Crowley, to give the impression that the Democratic Party is moving to the left and embracing positions of unheard-of radicalism on health care, education, immigration and the minimum wage.

Ocasio-Cortez has made the rounds of Sunday television interview programs, cable programs, late night network television, and received, by her own account, more than a thousand requests for interviews from print, television, radio and on-line media. The DSA itself has also been the subject of much media flattery, as in a June 29 Yahoo News profile headlined, “The Democratic Socialists of America show their muscle in New York congressional upset.”

The report noted that more than 100 DSA volunteers worked on the Ocasio-Cortez campaign, adding, “she isn’t the first candidate to score a dramatic upset with the help of the leftist organization. And if they have their way, she won’t be the last.” It later cites DSA or DSA-backed candidates for state legislative races in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia.

The corporate media gave wide publicity to Bernie Sanders’ announcement that he would travel to Kansas this week with Ocasio-Cortez to campaign for James Thompson and Brett Wolder in the Democratic primaries for Congress set for August 7.

Given the usually vicious anti-socialist bias of the media, the coverage given the DSA, and especially to Ocasio-Cortez, has been friendly. There has been no demonization of the DSA as espousing an “alien” philosophy, or as an advocate of “class warfare.” The *New York Times*, in an editorial after the primary, went so far as to hail Ocasio-Cortez as “a bright light in the Democratic Party who has brought desperately needed energy back to New York politics...”

In part, of course, that is because both the candidate and the DSA itself are a million miles away from genuine socialist politics. They don’t frighten the bourgeoisie in the slightest. But there is something else at work: the legitimization of a specific brand of extremely mild social-reformism, for the purpose of applying a new coat of paint to the dreary and discredited signboard of the Democratic Party.

This is a necessity to maintain the political monopoly of the corporate-controlled two-party system in America, in which the

Democratic Party is supposed to be the “left” political alternative. After a half century in which the Democratic Party has completely abandoned any serious proposals for social reform, and has worked actively to slash jobs, cut wages and make conditions of daily life worse, such a facelift is of critical importance for the ruling class.

The DSA does not represent the emergence of socialism, nor is it even a legitimate expression of a growing radical upsurge. As with the campaign of Bernie Sanders, it is a defensive reaction of the Democratic Party and the ruling class motivated by fear of a genuine movement of the working class.

Nothing in the Ocasio-Cortez/DSA platform would have raised any eyebrows in the Democratic Party of the 1960s and early 1970s, which had to strike an occasional “left” posture under conditions of the mass radicalization of workers and youth in that period. The DSA wish-list—“Medicare for all,” free college education, a \$15-an-hour minimum wage—says nothing at all about the socialist transformation of the US and world economy: not a word about public ownership of the means of production, or the confiscation of the massive wealth accumulated by the billionaires.

And most tellingly, not a word about foreign policy: the DSA’s version of “socialism” is completely compatible with the defense of the interests of American imperialism around the world. This is the most critical point, under conditions of ferocious infighting between rival factions of the ruling elite over foreign policy, particularly in relation to Syria and Russia.

The alignment of the DSA with American imperialism is intrinsic to its political DNA. The organization was founded in 1982 through the merger of two moribund and anti-communist organizations: the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee of Michael Harrington, and the New American Movement, one of the more conservative remnants of the New Left radicals of the 1960s.

Harrington and DSOC were political descendants of Shachtmanism, the right-wing breakaway from the American Trotskyist movement in 1940, which became the launching pad for many careers in anti-communist politics. Max Shachtman himself, after backing American imperialism in the Korean War, ended his days as an adviser to AFL-CIO President George Meany and a fervent supporter of the Vietnam War.

Harrington followed only a slightly less reactionary trajectory. He was aligned with that section of the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO bureaucracy that came to oppose the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, because they regarded it as undermining the global interests of American imperialism, as well as destabilizing the

United States politically.

The union officials kept the DSOC/DSA afloat financially, and Harrington in turn covered up their betrayals of workers' struggles, as when William Winpisinger of the International Association of Machinists, a DSOC member, isolated and sabotaged the PATCO air traffic controllers strike against Reagan in 1981. The DSA today is still heavily backed by a section of the AFL-CIO officialdom, and acts as their political apologist and "left" cover.

In the wake of the 2016 elections, in which the Sanders campaign revealed a vast audience for socialist politics—something which profoundly shocked the US ruling elite—the decision was made to bring forward the DSA as a catchment area to trap leftward-moving young people and contain them within the framework of capitalist politics and the two-party system. Ocasio-Cortez, a Sanders organizer and not a DSA member in 2016, personifies this policy.

There is little doubt that since her victory in the primary, Ocasio-Cortez has been "taken in hand" by politically more experienced elements in the Democratic Party and the capitalist state, and informed that a bit of radicalism is all right, but there are definite areas where she must not rock the boat. The newly minted Democratic candidate for Congress has quickly complied, abandoning several of her more "left" statements from the primary campaign, including the call to abolish Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), as well as her (very occasional and tepid) criticisms of Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people.

In a remarkable appearance on the program "Firing Line" on the Public Broadcasting System, Ocasio-Cortez was almost struck speechless when conservative host Margaret Hoover cited some of her tweets on Israel, including one calling the shooting of unarmed Palestinian civilians in Gaza by Israeli soldiers a "massacre," which it clearly was. The first words out of the candidate's mouth were, "I believe absolutely in Israel's right to exist. I am a proponent of a two-state solution." She went on to declare, referring to the November election, "And for me, it's not—this is not a referendum, I think, on the state of Israel."

She was unable to explain what she meant by referring to "the occupation of Palestine" by Israeli forces, literally throwing up her hands. "I am not the expert on geopolitics on this issue," she said, adding, "I just look at things through a human rights lens, and I may not use the right words [nervous laughter] I know this is a very intense issue." She went on to reassure her right-wing interviewer—and her audience in the political and national security establishments—of her eagerness to toe the line. "I'm willing to learn and evolve on this issue," she said.

It is not just on Israel where Ocasio-Cortez is "willing to learn and evolve." There was literally zero foreign policy content to her campaign against Crowley. She did not in any way appeal to the deep antiwar sentiments of working-class residents of her district and across the country.

As for the DSA, the organization itself, the magazine with which it is affiliated, *Jacobin*, and the broader pseudo-left milieu which promotes the DSA, are fully integrated into the foreign policy consensus of American imperialism. They applaud the supposed Syrian revolution, which is a right-wing Islamist insurgency financed by the CIA and armed by Saudi Arabia. They denounce Russia and China as "imperialist" powers and generally back US efforts to confront these rivals.

As the WSWs has previously explained, the dominant feature of the 2018 congressional campaign is the influx of dozens of former

military and intelligence operatives seeking Democratic Party nominations, many of them recruited and heavily promoted by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and other Democratic leadership groups.

There is an intrinsic connection between the personnel which the Democratic Party seeks to place in the next Congress, and its political platform. The Democratic leadership has based its critique of the Trump administration on the unproven allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

A pro-CIA, pro-military orientation lends itself naturally to the recruitment of dozens of ex-CIA and ex-military operatives to run as candidates for Congress. If the Democratic Party regains control of the House of Representatives November 6, military-intelligence candidates, not former Sanders' supporters like Ocasio-Cortez, will hold the balance of power.

The political outlook of these elements is summed up in a column by E.J. Dionne of the *Washington Post*, published July 16, in which one of the CIA Democrats, former State Department official Tom Malinowski, now the Democratic candidate in New Jersey's Seventh Congressional District, made the following remarkable summation of the Democratic program:

"We're now the party of fiscal responsibility in America," he told Dionne. "We're the party of law enforcement in America; we don't vilify the Federal Bureau of Investigation every single day. We're the party of family values. We don't ... take kids from their parents at the border. We're the party of patriotism in America that wants to defend this country against our foreign adversaries."

It is an instructive political fact that there is not the slightest contradiction between the Democratic Party putting forward a cadre of new members of the House of Representatives drawn from the military-intelligence apparatus and the Democratic Party embracing Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Democratic Socialists of America.

Ocasio-Cortez will enter the US House of Representatives after the November election, and if the Democrats win the majority, she will be arm-in-arm with newly elected colleagues whose previous experience was as CIA agents, military commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan, or war planners at the Pentagon, State Department and White House.

This fact underscores the real character of the DSA and its entire effort to "reform" the Democratic Party. Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA are propping up one of the two parties of American imperialism, while seeking to block the emergence of an independent movement of the working class directed against the capitalist system and all its political defenders and apologists.



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