

# Cynthia Nixon discovers “democratic socialism” in challenge to NY Governor Cuomo

Fred Mazelis  
24 July 2018

In a development that illustrates the tactical divisions within the Democratic Party and the role of the pseudo-left within it, Cynthia Nixon, the challenger to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in the state’s upcoming September primary, recently announced that she considers herself a “democratic socialist.”

“If being a democratic socialist means that you believe health care, housing, education and the things we need to thrive should be a basic right, not a privilege, then count me in,” Nixon told the *Politico* website. The candidate’s sudden embrace of the socialist label came shortly after the June 26 primary victory of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez against veteran US Congressman Joseph Crowley in New York’s 14th Congressional District. Crowley is the fourth-highest-ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives.

Nixon, who announced her campaign in March, is best known for her former role in the *Sex and the City* television series. A longtime Democrat who is associated with the nominally “progressive” wing of the party, she is close to New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. Her campaign up to now has been similar to that of Fordham University law professor and liberal activist Zephyr Teachout, who ran against the right-wing Democratic governor in 2014 and won an unexpectedly high 34 percent of the primary vote.

Nixon has been endorsed by the Working Families Party, the organization that has functioned for the 20 years of its existence as a lobby, seeking—with virtually no success—to push the Democrats to adopt more liberal rhetoric and party platforms.

Along with promises about health care and other social and economic issues, Nixon’s campaign has focused on such issues as corruption in the state capital and money in politics. Known for her own same-sex marriage, the candidate has raised such issues as abortion rights and opposition to mass incarceration, but presented them within the framework of identity politics, not as democratic rights

that must be fought for by the working class as a whole.

Despite Cuomo’s right-wing record and the lack of any enthusiasm for the incumbent, Nixon has so far attracted little support in the working class for her warmed-over liberalism. Recent poll numbers have suggested that she might not win as large a vote as Teachout did four years ago. This is part of the reason for her new “socialist” label, as she and her advisers note the growing interest in socialism reflected in Ocasio-Cortez’s success.

Nixon’s brand of “socialism” is no more genuine than that of Ocasio-Cortez. She talks about increasing taxes on the rich to fund improved health care, housing and education. Her campaign website includes sections entitled “Rent Justice for All,” “Schools Not Jails” and “Fixing the Subways,” but the program amounts at best to modest reform demands such as the extension of the city’s rent stabilization program and spending for desperately needed modernization of the subway signal system. Nixon promises huge improvements in the educational system, but says absolutely nothing about a political struggle against the oligarchs and their stolen wealth in the capital of American capitalism, without which nothing can be achieved.

She is silent about the role of the working class. Nixon’s few references to the working class and the poor portray them as victims, not as a powerful social force whose independent political mobilization is required in order to win even the most modest reforms amid the crisis and decay of 21st century capitalism.

Ocasio-Cortez has welcomed Nixon’s recent declaration and endorsed her in the upcoming gubernatorial primary. The recent exchange of compliments demonstrates the role of both of these candidates, the recent primary victor as well as the primary opponent of Cuomo. They are safety valves, seeking to tap into the growing disgust with the Democratic Party of Wall Street and the CIA, only to direct it back into the same swamp of capitalist politics, based on the fraudulent proposition that this party of the ruling class can

be utilized for progressive purposes.

While the DSA itself has not yet officially endorsed Nixon's campaign, its politically linked *Jacobin* magazine has published both an interview with the candidate and an admiring commentary.

Nixon called Ocasio-Cortez's victory "an enormous red-letter day for us all." She declared her disagreement with House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi's refusal to embrace the importance of the appeal of socialism. Most significantly, she combined her praise for Ocasio-Cortez with her proud assertion that she, not Cuomo, is the real Democrat in the race.

"[D]espite calling himself a Democrat, [Cuomo] has governed like a Republican," according to Nixon. "[H]is policies are purely Republican... He is a Republican politician who has always been about consolidating his own power." The "lack of progressive change" in New York, Nixon declares, can be laid "directly at the doorstep of Andrew Cuomo."

The idea that Cuomo, for all his corruption and right-wing policies, is almost single-handedly responsible for holding back the "progressive" Democrats is laughable. The purpose of Nixon's demagogic attack is to provide a cover for her unabashed affirmation of loyalty to the party that rescued the banks at the expense of the working class, presided for the two terms of Barack Obama over record growth in inequality along with continuous war all over the world, and for the past four decades, both in opposition and in power, has enacted or agreed to the shredding of the social safety net, the destruction of welfare, the privatization of education and health care, and a second Gilded Age characterized by a gulf between haves and have-nots like no other in US history.

It is obvious that, for both Ms. Nixon and the editors of *Jacobin*, "democratic socialism" means re-costuming this discredited party of US imperialism in "socialist" disguise.

*Jacobin* followed the interview with a commentary titled "What Nixon's Left Turn Means." It calls the minimal reforms proposed by Nixon "firmly in line with those of other democratic-socialist candidates," including Ocasio-Cortez. That says more about the DSA candidates than it does about the liberal Nixon, who is to a large extent repeating the kind of radical-sounding proposals advanced by New York City Mayor de Blasio when he ran for office in 2013 on the slogan, "A Tale of Two Cities." Once in office, de Blasio dropped every single proposal that would have required a fight against the forces on Wall Street whom he represented and continues to represent in City Hall.

Flaunting its own cynicism, *Jacobin* continues: "There's no way to know whether [democratic socialism] is what she—a millionaire celebrity—actually believes to be her true political identity. But what she believes in her heart of hearts

isn't that important."

What is important is that "if Nixon were to upset Cuomo... her independence suggests that the progressive groups which support her would likely have a seat at the table under her administration."

*Jacobin* continues: "And she has brought into her campaign a number of staffers with established left politics, which bodes well for how she would govern—and for who she may appoint to key policy roles—once in office."

Here we get to the proverbial bottom line. "A seat at the table!" A chance to secure posts and privileges as part of a government of big business, either openly or as "advisers!" The author blurts out the common aspiration of the fake "socialists" and hypocrites who produce publications such as *Jacobin* and the comfortable middle-class opportunists who run the DSA to land "key policy roles"—along with the pay and perks of office.

The anti-working class character of the DSA—its role, jointly carried out with Bernie Sanders and Sanders-type candidates, including Nixon—could not be any clearer. It utters a few perfunctory words about the importance of "mass movements," but what drives the DSA is the need, on behalf of American capitalism, to prop up the Democratic Party.

"Candidates like Nixon running openly as democratic socialists can introduce a vision beyond the free-market fundamentalism that has defined our economic and political system for decades," *Jacobin* declares. In its view, the social counterrevolution of the past 40-50 years is not the outcome of the decline of American capitalism, enacted by both of its political parties, but rather the result of a false "vision," that of "free-market fundamentalism." The tactical divisions within these circles, and between them and the Democrats, are over how best to deal with the emerging movement of the working class and the specter of socialist revolution.

Liberalism cannot be revived. The crisis-ridden capitalist system can no longer draw upon the resources it did in the period between the New Deal and the Great Society. American capitalism today is preparing for war and dictatorship, and those like the DSA, who suggest that the Democrats' lurch to the right can be reversed by electoral pressure, are working to block the path to the political independence of the working class.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**