

Socialist Alternative on New York primaries: Burrowing further into the Democratic Party

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Socialist Alternative's response to New York's recent state primary elections has underscored the organization's role as an appendage of the Democratic Party.

Since 2015, when Socialist Alternative formed “#Movement4Bernie,” it has been oriented openly to the Democratic Party and supposedly progressive figures within it, particularly the nominally “independent” Senator Bernie Sanders. This coincides with Socialist Alternative's support for the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which is itself a faction of the Democratic Party.

Socialist Alternative responded to the September 13 primary elections in New York in an article posted on its website under the headline “After the Salazar victory in New York: Build a Movement to Demand Change.” The article by Leon Pinsky argues for a “movement in 2019 to compel the state legislature in Albany to pass the progressive legislation working people need.” In other words, it calls for a pressure group inside and outside of the New York Democratic Party, whose record in the state legislature is marked by slavish subordination to Wall Street and pervasive corruption.

Pinsky begins by hailing the fact that the elections “saw the biggest voter turnout for a Democratic primary in more than two decades, providing further evidence of a ‘blue wave’ coming for Trump this November.”

“At the same time,” Pinsky informs us, “the primary also showed the potential for socialists and progressives to gain ground.” The main evidence for this claim is the fact that DSA member Julia Salazar won the primary to become the Democratic candidate for state senator from New York's 18th State Senate District, which covers part of north Brooklyn.

Pinsky writes, “Socialist Alternative members were active in Salazar's campaign,” although they “did not agree with Salazar's decision to run as a Democrat.”

Socialist Alternative speaks of the decision to run as a

representative of the Democratic Party—a party of American imperialism up to its eyeballs in blood and criminality—as though it were a mere technicality of no great political significance. In reality, Socialist Alternative's active support for this Democrat masquerading as some sort of socialist defines it as an opponent of the political independence of the working class.

That Salazar ran as a Democrat is key to the political role of her campaign as well as that of other DSA Democrats such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Their political function is to prop up the Democratic Party, funnel leftward-moving workers and youth behind it, and block the emergence of an independent political movement of the working class.

Significantly, Socialist Alternative has nothing concrete to say about the demonstrable lies that were put out by Salazar's campaign, instead denouncing “[t]he highly publicized and coordinated smear attacks on Salazar in the last weeks of her campaign.”

Contrary to the claims of the DSA, the International Socialist Organization and Socialist Alternative that the Salazar revelations were merely a “smear campaign,” Salazar has been shown to have lied or misrepresented facts regarding her immigration status, her socioeconomic background and, most critically, her political history.

Her campaign website boasts of her “decade of experience as a local community organizer.” In fact, she spent much of this time as a right-wing activist, playing leading roles in Zionist and anti-abortion organizations at Columbia University. She appeared on far-right TV host Glenn Beck's show in 2012 and successfully campaigned to prevent mandatory student health insurance fees from being used to pay for students' abortions.

Her political and religious views apparently shifted drastically in the space of a year. She maintained relations with right-wing Zionists into 2013, but says she began

attending *Jacobin* reading groups the following year before joining the New York City DSA's leadership.

The most ambitious of Socialist Alternative's friendly suggestions to the DSA is to "launch a socialist ballot line in New York and run independent candidates in local elections in 2020"—in other words, provide a façade of independence for their joint promotion of the Democratic Party.

The rest of Pinsky's article is a defense of the Democratic Party's so-called "progressive" wing, including actress Cynthia Nixon, who ran unsuccessfully against incumbent Governor Andrew Cuomo in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. Nixon, according to Pinsky, "also ran on a left platform and declared her support for socialism during the campaign."

There was nothing socialist about Nixon's campaign. Her platform consisted of mild reform measures that would have placed her, at the most, slightly left of center in the Democratic Party of the 1960s.

Socialist Alternative's role in the New York primaries was of a piece with its previous interventions. Even before launching #Movement4Bernie, it formed an electoral alliance with Democratic City Council candidates in Seattle.

In the 2016 Democratic presidential primaries, leading Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant stumped for Sanders, sharing platforms with the longtime Democratic Party operative. After Sanders conceded the primary race to Hillary Clinton, Sawant urged him to run as an independent in the general election—with the caveat that he do so only in states that were not considered to be swing states, so as not to damage Clinton's chances against Donald Trump.

Since then, Socialist Alternative has urged the DSA to found "a new, broad, democratic Socialist Party," which Socialist Alternative would enter. It has simultaneously urged Sanders to found a "People's Party," overlooking his role as a leading figure in the Democratic Senate caucus.

A recent article on the Democratic primary victory in Massachusetts of Ayanna Pressley, a longtime party functionary, spells out even more clearly Socialist Alternative's grotesquely opportunist trailing behind the Democrats, calling on working people and youth to apply pressure on "progressive Democrats."

Relentlessly carrying water for the DSA and Sanders has proven too much for some Socialist Alternative members. Leading members and at least one whole branch have resigned. Members have left to join Maoist

and anarchist tendencies. Some have acted on the logic of the organization's lionization of the Democratic Socialists of America and boosting of the Democrats by joining the DSA.

Socialist Alternative's coverage of the midterm primaries implies that the Democratic Party is moving to the left, even as it is running an unprecedented number of former military, intelligence and State Department operatives, whom the *World Socialist Web Site* has identified as "CIA Democrats." This integration of the Democratic Party into the military/intelligence apparatus is of a piece with the reactionary political basis of its opposition to Trump.

The Democrats are opposing Trump on the most right-wing basis possible. They are focusing not on his warmongering, his police-state assault on immigrants, his tax cuts for corporations and the rich—all of which are massively unpopular. Rather, they are opposing Trump on the grounds that he is "soft" on Russia and Putin and insufficiently aggressive in combating Russian-inspired "fake news," i.e., in imposing Internet censorship against left-wing, anti-war and socialist views.

This is combined with their #MeToo witch hunt against alleged sexual abusers, which rejects fundamental democratic precepts such as the presumption of innocence and due process. This is aimed at diverting attention from soaring social inequality and the fundamental class issues that are driving a resurgence of class struggle and sowing divisions in the working class on the basis of gender and sex.

The promotion of DSA-linked phony "progressives" such as Ocasio-Cortez and Salazar by Socialist Alternative and the rest of the pseudo-left organizations is an effort to provide a "left" gloss to the Democratic Party as it lurches ever further to the right.



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