

Florida gubernatorial election: Suddenly “socialism” becomes the issue

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A major feature of the November 6 midterm election campaign in the United States is an effort to divert a left-wing movement of the working class into the safe channels of the Democratic Party.

While the pro-imperialist orientation of the Democrats is demonstrated by the dozens of congressional candidates with ties to the military-intelligence apparatus, a relative handful of pseudo-left candidates like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York City are being used to give the Democrats an entirely undeserved radical and progressive image.

In Florida, this is being done with the Democratic Party candidate for governor, Andrew Gillum, the African-American mayor of Tallahassee, who won the August 26 primary in an upset over several more conservative candidates, including the favorite of the party establishment, former Representative Gwen Graham, daughter of former governor and US senator Bob Graham.

The presentation of Gillum as a progressive, left-wing candidate has brought out the age-worn red-baiting techniques of right-wing commentators, who consider virtually anything to the left of Ronald Reagan as socialism. For these types, mild reforms like minimum wage increases, and even phony reforms such as Obamacare, are signs of socialism. However, the idea that Gillum represents anything close to socialism is preposterous.

Gillum, a 39-year-old African American, is the current mayor of the state capital of Florida, and served on the Tallahassee City Commission from 2003 to 2014. He has close relations with the Tallahassee Police Department, promoting “safe neighborhoods” as a response to shooting incidents in the state.

After he won the Democratic nomination to face ultra-right Republican Congressman Ron DeSantis, who ran

a Trump-style campaign, Gillum was heavily promoted by the liberal and pseudo-left press as the first black nominee of a major party for governor of Florida, and as a Bernie Sanders-type progressive candidate.

In his television advertisements, Gillum claims that he will invest \$1 billion in education, create Medicare for everyone, and establish a \$15 minimum wage, all while “beating” the NRA. He talks about overcoming impossible odds to be put in the position to win the gubernatorial race as the “first black governor” in the same way that Hillary Clinton was presented as the potential “first woman president” and Barack Obama as the “first black president.”

As he is a thoroughly bourgeois politician, workers should not be fooled by the presentation of Gillum as some sort of radical. He has never even been a Sanders-type pretend reformer within the party, supporting Clinton in 2016. He is only distinguished from his pro-corporate counterparts by his race, in what amounts to attempting the Obama swindle a second time. Stacy Abrams, the Democratic candidate for governor in neighboring Georgia, is attempting a similar swindle, only twice as big, since she is a dual-minority candidate, female and black, running against an ultra-right Trump-style Republican.

Gillum’s selection of millionaire investor Chris King as his running mate demonstrates his real class loyalties. King is the founder of the Elevation Financial Group, a company that acquires low-cost housing units and turns them for profit. King is openly religious and presents himself as an “evangelical Christian,” which is intended to ingratiate Gillum with members of the Christian fundamentalist right who might be skeptical of Gillum’s supposedly more “left” ideas.

The endorsements and support Gillum has received from various politicians and media personalities also

exposes his pro-corporate character. He has received support from celebrities who have benefited commercially from reactionary identity politics such as Tyler Perry and #MeToo figurehead Alyssa Milano. He has also been endorsed by Bernie Sanders, and was one of the several hundred Democratic Party candidates endorsed by former President Barack Obama last week.

Despite the rhetoric of his campaign advertisements, Gillum is a political representative of the capitalist class no less than DeSantis, and in some ways more so since he is more of a “mainstream” pro-corporate politician than his Trump-style opponent. In a sense, this is a rerun of the presidential race, with DeSantis standing in for Trump and Gillum for Clinton. Trump carried Florida by a small margin, but popular opinion in Florida, as elsewhere, has turned sharply against the administration, and Gillum is narrowly ahead in the polls

Both Trump and DeSantis have launched strident attacks on Gillum since the primaries, claiming that he has a “socialist” agenda. This began when Trump called Gillum a “failed socialist mayor” a few hours after he won the Democratic primary, and has continued as a main talking point for DeSantis. In early September DeSantis told an audience in Miami that “socialism would be a disaster for Florida. We can’t let socialist policies win in this free land.”

In part, this is an effort to curry favor with older Cuban voters in south Florida with out-and-out red-baiting. But it also expresses the genuine fear of socialism that animates the entire US ruling elite, particularly after the 13 million votes cast for Sanders in the 2016 primaries, reinforced by opinion polls showing that young people in America have a more favorable attitude to socialism than to capitalism.

While Gillum himself has chosen to ignore the claims that he is a socialist—and he has not been compelled to address the issue directly because debates with DeSantis have been postponed due to Hurricane Michael—one of his campaign organizers has chosen to fire back with redbaiting charges of her own.

The leader of Venezuelans for Gillum vilified DeSantis for accepting \$75,000 in campaign contributions from Sunshine Gasoline, which has a tenuous connection to CITGO, owned by the Petróleos de Venezuela, the national oil company of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. She tweeted about

the DeSantis campaign: “They come to Miami, lie and exploit the suffering of people who have fled socialist dictatorships, but yes, they happily accept dirty money from Venezuela. A total hypocrisy.”

This response of the Democratic Party, to respond to red-baiting with red-baiting, shows how frightened the ruling elites are that workers and young people are looking more favorably on socialism. It underscores that so-called progressive candidates in the Democratic Party are just as ardent defenders of capitalism as the ultra-right Trump lovers in the Republican Party.



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