Democrats re-elect a right-wing leadership

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The Democratic Party won control of the House of Representatives in the US midterm election November 6, making what now appears to be a gain of 40 seats from the Republicans, the largest Democratic victory since the 1974 election held after Republican President Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace over the Watergate scandal.

Some 61 new Democratic representatives have arrived on Capitol Hill, including 31 who defeated Republican incumbents, 12 who won Republican seats left vacant by retirement, 17 who won Democratic-held seats where the incumbent retired, and two—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley—who defeated incumbent Democrats in a primary challenge.

Yet despite the turnover of more than one quarter of its membership, the first meeting of the House Democratic Caucus reelected the top three leaders without opposition. The 78-year-old Nancy Pelosi, who has led the House Democrats since 2002, was nominated for House speaker by a vote of 203-32. Steny Hoyer, 79, Pelosi's deputy since 2002, was elected House majority leader by acclamation. James Clyburn, 78, the third-ranking Democrat since 2006, was elected House majority whip by acclamation.

The reelection of the Pelosi-Hoyer-Clyburn leadership is a reaffirmation by the congressional Democrats that there will be no significant change in the program, tactics or strategy of the Democratic Party, despite the overwhelming anti-Trump vote on November 6. By one tally, a record 111 million people voted in the midterms, and they gave a nine million-vote majority to Democratic candidates over their Republican opponents.

Far from taking this vote as a mandate to oppose the Trump administration's right-wing policies, let alone move towards confronting Trump directly over his attacks on democratic rights, persecution of immigrants and moves towards economic warfare and outright military conflict, the Pelosi leadership has been at pains to declare its determination to cooperate and collaborate with the White House wherever possible.

Pelosi preached conciliation with Trump as soon as the scale of the Democratic victory November 6 became apparent. She has repeatedly offered to work with the administration on issues like infrastructure spending, prescription drug prices and measures to defend the US election machinery from supposed cyber-attacks by Russia, China or Iran.

And following her insistence during the election campaign that Trump's barbaric treatment of immigrants was a "diversion" from the real issues, she has remained virtually silent as Trump has ordered the teargasing of women and children on the border, the building of concentration camps and an effective end to the right of asylum, while mobilizing the military to enforce this regime of terror and intimidation.

Democratic strategists have even suggested finding ways to split Trump away from the Republican-led Senate in areas where there is "common ground" with the Democrats, such as protectionist measures directed against China or federal spending for infrastructure projects, a 2018 version of the notorious "triangulation" policy pursued by the Clinton White House in the 1990s.

None of these actions come as a surprise to anyone who studies the political record of Pelosi and the Democrats over the past two decades. Pelosi herself is one of the wealthiest members of Congress, married to a real estate investor with a fortune approaching $100 million. She is a trusted servant of American imperialism, chosen by the Democratic leadership to serve on the House Intelligence Committee, where she rose to the position of ranking member—the senior Democrat—before succeeding Richard Gephardt in 2002 as the leader of the Democratic Party in the House of Representatives.

It is not possible within the framework of this commentary to describe Pelosi's right-wing political record in detail. Suffice it to say she specializes in a handwringing verbal condemnation of the worst atrocities of Republican administrations, while doing nothing to stop them. Under Barack Obama, she was a full-throated supporter of the most reactionary measures taken by the Democratic administration: drone-missile assassinations,

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the wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen, the bailout of Wall Street, the arrest and deportation of more immigrants than all previous US administrations combined.

Pelosi has a noxious record on national security issues, particularly domestic spying, as befits a longtime member of the House Intelligence Committee who was regularly briefed, both as minority leader and as house speaker, on the most sensitive and antidemocratic actions taken by the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations. She voted to establish the Department of Homeland Security in 2002, devised and voted for a resolution supporting US troops after Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, repeatedly backed military appropriations for the war in Iraq, even after the Democrats won control of the House in 2006 based on a limited appeal to antiwar sentiment.

She opposed calls for immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and for the impeachment of George W. Bush for launching a war based on lies. In December 2005, when widespread NSA domestic spying was made public, she admitted having known about it for years, while she was the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee.

In 2007, she devised a legislative maneuver to allow a minority of Democrats to join with most Republicans to renew funding for the Bush military offensive in Iraq (the "surge"), which ignited all-out slaughter between rival Sunni and Shi'ite militias in the war-torn country. Pelosi was so identified with the Democratic Party's betrayal of popular antiwar sentiment that Cindy Sheehan, who became a prominent antiwar activist after the death of her son in Iraq, chose to run against her in the 2008 congressional election.

Under Obama, Pelosi was "credited" with the passage of the Affordable Care Act, an effort to shift the burden of healthcare spending from the government and corporations to individual working people, packaged falsely as a progressive "reform." She also ensured passage of the Dodd-Frank legislation, billed as punishment of Wall Street for the 2008 financial crash. But no bankers went to jail and the supposed regulations proved a dead letter. Today, the biggest banks and hedge funds are bigger than ever and engage in gambling even more recklessly than in 2008, setting the stage for an even bigger collapse.

Given this atrocious right-wing record, it is a remarkable fact that the only opposition to the re-nomination of Pelosi as the Democratic leader in the House came from the right, from Democrats seeking to push the party into an even closer alignment with Trump and the Republicans, particularly on issues like trade, immigration and the military build-up. The most prominent leader of this group, Representative Seth Moulton, a two-term congressman from Massachusetts, is a former Iraq War unit commander and the godfather of the political operation that has placed 11 veterans of the national security apparatus—CIA operatives, military officers, civilian war planners—among the newly elected House Democrats.

Meanwhile, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the congresswoman-elect from New York's 14th District and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, idolized by the pseudo-left and endlessly promoted by the corporate media, gave her backing to Pelosi, declaring that those opposing her within the Democratic caucus wanted to push the party further to the right. This happens to be true, but it amounts to a self-indictment of groups like the DSA, which claim that this right-wing imperialist party, eternally committed to the defense of corporate America and its imperialist interests, can be pushed to the left.

A lengthy profile in *Jacobin*, the pro-DSA magazine, effectively endorses Pelosi, citing Ocasio-Cortez's observation that her only challengers are to her right and arguing, "Pelosi's re-ascent isn't a disaster—in a darker timeline, it could have been centrist Steny Hoyer in her place." Now there is a bold perspective: Using a political microscope to find the miniscule differences between a proven war criminal and servant of capital and her deputy for the past 16 years!

There is no way forward for working people through the Democratic Party. The first step in any genuine struggle to fight for jobs and decent living standards, defend democratic rights and oppose imperialist war is for the working class to break free of the Democratic Party and build an independent mass political movement of its own, fighting for a socialist and antiwar program.

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