

# Obama, Pelosi push Democrats further to the right

Patrick Martin  
8 April 2019

In back-to-back interventions this week, the current and former top Democrats in Washington called for the party to move even further to the right. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former President Barack Obama were singing from the same hymn book, disparaging rhetorical calls for “Medicare for all” and other reform policies in favor of a conservative, pro-business approach.

Pelosi led the way in an interview with the *Washington Post*, in which she dismissed the “Medicare for all” proposal pushed by a number of candidates for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination as well as members of her own caucus in the House of Representatives. Accepting the \$32 trillion price tag placed on the proposal by a right-wing think tank, Pelosi said that both the cost and the potential benefits of the plan remained to be explained. “I’m agnostic,” she told the *Post*. “Show me how you think you can get there.”

The House speaker said she preferred a plan based on the Affordable Care Act—the reactionary program enacted under the Obama administration in 2010, which aims to cut spending on health care while safeguarding the profits of the drug and health insurance companies—to any new system.

“When most people say they’re for Medicare for all, I think they mean health care for all,” Pelosi said. “Let’s see what that means. A lot of people love having their employer-based insurance and the Affordable Care Act gave them better benefits.”

Pelosi rejected the notion that the Democratic Party had moved to the left since the Obama presidency, claiming that it was “just a few people” with high profiles and some of the “presidentials.” This was clearly a reference to Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders, both self-

proclaimed “democratic socialists.”

The House speaker, married to a multimillionaire real estate developer, has made it clear that she is perfectly willing to tolerate left-talkers like Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders, as long as they don’t actually determine the policy of either the Democratic Party or the US government.

Former President Obama sounded the same theme in remarks Saturday to a town hall organized by the Obama Foundation in Berlin, where he discussed the rise of the ultra-right in Europe and internationally and warned against any shift to the left in response to it. He denounced “left” critics of the Democratic Party leadership for undermining party unity.

“One of the things I do worry about sometimes among progressives in the United States...is a certain kind of rigidity, where we say, ‘Oh, I’m sorry, this is how it’s going to be,’” he said. “And then we start sometimes creating what’s called a ‘circular firing squad’ where you start shooting at your allies because one of them is straying from purity on the issues.”

Obama employed a modicum of “left” rhetoric in his own campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008, running against Hillary Clinton, the initial choice of the party establishment. But he quickly abandoned this in the general election campaign, where he presented himself as the more reliable defender of Wall Street in the midst of the 2008 financial crash.

Once in the White House, Obama headed a thoroughly right-wing imperialist government, continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan launched by George W. Bush and launching new wars in Libya and (by proxy) in Syria and Yemen. He protected CIA torturers and NSA surveillance of the American people.

In his domestic policy, Obama presented the

Affordable Care Act as a progressive reform, although it actually marked a regressive reinforcement of the domination of private insurance companies and health care providers by forcing millions of impoverished working people to buy insurance, rather than establishing health care as a basic right, regardless of ability to pay.

Obama even advocated conciliation with the racist anti-immigrant policies espoused by Trump and the European fascist movements such as the Alternative for Germany. “We can’t label everybody who is disturbed by immigration as racist,” he said. “You know, that’s a self-defeating tactic. You push away potential allies, people who maybe just haven’t thought about it...”

Obama and Pelosi have been working together in a joint effort to curb the activities of the “lefts” in the House Democratic caucus. The House speaker brought in the former president to address a meeting of the caucus last month for that purpose. Pelosi’s top deputy, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, has frequently underscored the fact that there are 62 new Democratic representatives in the House, not three, a sarcastic reference to the publicity given Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar.

The views expressed by Pelosi and Obama were echoed by the undeclared frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination, Obama’s former vice president, Joe Biden. Speaking to reporters Friday, Biden sought to clarify his remarks at a Democratic fundraiser in Delaware, where he declared he would be “the most progressive candidate” in the race.

He emphasized that this referred to issues relating to identity politics and did not refer to the question, “Are you a socialist?” He argued that the “party has not moved” in the direction of socialism, and that “the vast majority of the members of the Democratic Party are still basically liberal to moderate Democrats in the traditional sense.”

Biden’s distancing of himself from the Sanders/Ocasio-Cortez wing of the party is an adaptation to the anti-socialist rampage of President Trump and sections of the Republican Party, backed by the ultra-right media. He knows very well that the “left” Democrats are nothing more than moderate liberals themselves, people who would have been considered middle-of-the-road in the Democratic Party of the 1960s.

Meanwhile, the House Democratic leadership is moving to clip the wings of Ocasio-Cortez, Tlaib and a handful of other “lefts” in the party caucus. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) has enacted a new policy barring DCCC funds for any polling or consulting firm that works for a primary challenger to an incumbent Democrat. The goal is to prevent any repetition of the campaigns by Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley, who defeated more conservative incumbent Democrats in safe Democratic seats in New York City and Boston.



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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