

Leaders of dissolved International Socialist Organization openly embrace Democratic Party politics

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The membership of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US, founded in 1977, was stampeded into voting to dissolve the group in late March. The final statement (“Taking Our Final Steps”) of “the leadership team” responsible for carrying out the liquidation of the organization was posted April 19 on the now-defunct *Socialist Worker* website. The immediate pretext was the alleged internal mishandling of an accusation of sexual assault by a leading ISO member in 2013.

With remarkable swiftness, the ISO has disappeared from the political scene.

In its April 2 statement, “Factional provocation, middle-class hysteria, and the collapse of the International Socialist Organization,” the Political Committee of the Socialist Equality Party explained that the ISO’s self-destruction had “effectively removed an organizational barrier to the integration of its dominant faction into the political orbit of the Democratic Party.”

In other words, as grossly cynical and opportunist as the ISO’s activities had been, its continued existence as a grouping nominally outside the Democratic Party had come to represent something of a hindrance or a threat. The crisis of the American political system was so advanced and the fears of the ruling elite of a popular radicalization were so great that even the ISO’s minimal, token independence could no longer be tolerated.

The truth of this contention has already been borne out.

The brouhaha about the sex allegations provided a noisy, diversionary cover for a change in the orientation of the ISO or its remnants to direct participation in bourgeois politics, largely through the medium of relations with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a Democratic Party faction.

Whatever misgivings ISO leaders may have had in the past about expressing support for Sen. Bernie Sanders and other left-talking Democrats have been swept away in the muddy torrent unleashed in March.

Todd Chretien, formerly an ISO leader in northern California, launched a blog in the wake of the organization’s collapse, “Revolutionary Socialist,” on which he has managed to post four items in three months. In one of these supremely shallow efforts, a supposed political obituary for the ISO, whose headline reflects the middle class pessimism and defeatism that characterizes this social layer, “State murder, wars, and strikes: What do you do when you can’t do much?,” Chretien acknowledges that the ISO

had been edging closer to the DSA in recent years.

He observes that the ISO had not done enough to open “discussions among the entire left [i.e., with the DSA] about new formations, joint work, and collaboration.” However, he went on, “To our credit, we took significant steps in that direction: helping launch *Jacobin* [the DSA’s quarterly magazine] reading groups in 2015, developing friendly relations with DSA even before Bernie, lots of local united front work, supporting broader participation in the annual Socialism Conference, etc. However, the ‘small party’ model constrained it all and there was a tendency—especially concentrated in the old leadership, but not exclusively so—to dismiss new developments and new organizations. That’s all natural enough coming out of a long, dull period, but when confronted with mass rise of DSA, we should have dared to rethink, instead, we tinkered.” Chretien and company no longer feel “constrained.”

Those former leading ISO members with a public presence now think nothing of directly passing on communications from the Democratic Party and its orbit without comment or criticism. This goes hand-in-hand with a virtual silence on the fate of the organization with which some of them were associated for decades.

Elizabeth Wrigley-Field, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota, was one of the loudest voices for the irrationalist and repressive #MeToo frenzy during the ISO’s final days. She openly expressed contempt for democratic procedures when it came to sexual assault cases. Admitting that she “never read” any of the documents relating to the 2013 allegations, Wrigley-Field explained that “I believe the accusation.”

On her Twitter account, Wrigley-Field, now a member of the DSA, retweets messages from Democratic Party politicians Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib and Elizabeth Warren, *Jacobin*, the DSA, national vice president and executive board member of the AFL-CIO RoseAnne DeMoro and the AFL-CIO itself.

Another longtime figure in the ISO, Sherry Wolf, on Twitter likewise passes on without comment communications from Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, Democratic congresswoman Ilhan Omar, *Jacobin*, the DSA, etc.

The case of Wolf has a special irony that will undoubtedly be lost on this inveterate opportunist. In April 2012, unable to restrain

her indignation, Wolf wrote the WWSWS to angrily protest a comment by Joseph Kishore that discussed the response of various political forces, including the ISO, to the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. Kishore had argued that when the ISO called for a “new civil rights movement,” Wolf’s organization actually meant “a race-based movement subordinated to the likes of Jesse Jackson and [Rev. Al] Sharpton, and, therefore, the Democratic Party and the Obama administration.” To her denunciation of the article, Wolf added this “stinging” addendum, “Is your inability to grasp the ISO’s 35 years of unbending opposition to the Dems [Democrats] a result of colossal idiocy or just garden variety mendacity?”

The “idiocy” or “mendacity” in question was elementary truth-telling. Seven years later, it would need to be updated. Wolf and the rest of the ex-ISO have passed *en masse* from subordination to the capitalist political set-up through corrupt figures such as Jackson and Sharpton to open shilling for Democratic Party politicians. Like every other “garden variety” petty bourgeois operator and political charlatan, Wolf will never bother to explain how supposed “unbending opposition” became something else.

The former ISO leaders would no doubt argue they are simply responding to “new realities,” what they claim is a turn to the left by significant sections of the Democratic Party. This is one of the most dangerous falsehoods of our time. The Sanders campaign is not an expression of such a movement, it is the opposite of that—an effort to channel and render harmless the historic radicalization taking place within the American and international working class. His campaign reflects the terror with which more astute elements in the ruling elite regard this leftward political shift of masses of people and their determination to suppress it, by turning this movement back toward the Democratic Party, the graveyard of political opposition in the US. The ex-leaders of the ISO are aiding and abetting this effort to strangle working class opposition.

In reality, the Democrats have lurched to the right on every front. Their opposition to Donald Trump has had an extremely reactionary character, with anti-Russian warmongering at its center and the #MeToo sexual witch-hunt another of its theaters of operation.

The examples of Wrigley-Field and Wolf can be repeated ad nauseam. Another former ISO leader and member of its final Steering Committee, Danny Katch, rushes to the defense of Sanders on Twitter, arguing that “People want policy proposals, but also a larger meaning and purpose. Bernie’s popular because he’s a socialist, not in spite of it.”

Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, another identity politics warrior, has become an especially determined promoter of the Democratic Party. She is now “all in.” Taylor re-tweets comments from Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, Warren, Tlaib, Omar, former Clinton cabinet member Robert Reich, former Georgia Democratic state legislator Stacey Abrams, the DSA, etc.

Taylor, a former member of the ISO Steering Committee and a tenured faculty member at Princeton University, has gone the others from the ISO one better, offering the most unambiguous and slavish support for the Sanders campaign in an article in *Jacobin* (“Bernie Sanders’ Democratic Socialism Speech Was a Landmark,” June 18).

She wrote her piece to express admiration in particular for the Vermont senator’s June 12 speech in which he explained that his conception of “socialism” was entirely in conformity with the politics and traditions of the Democratic Party, “that is,” as the WWSWS observed, “a ‘socialism’ devoid of any opposition to capitalism and war.” In his remarks, Sanders identified himself with Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson, all of them—with differing degrees of farsightedness—committed and conscious defenders of the profit system in the US and its global imperialist interests.

Taylor refers to Sanders’ “electrifying presidential campaign” and proceeds from there. “In the course of a single speech” on June 12, she writes, “Sanders demonstrated the existential threat he poses to the political status quo in the United States by exposing the roots of the hardship and deprivation that roil wide swaths of the country. He named capitalism as the culprit and democratic socialism as a solution. What a breathtaking turn of events.”

She notices a few defects in Sanders’ presentation, including his American nationalism and “silence on the crimes of US foreign policy.” But, Taylor continues, “to focus on this and other omissions is to truly miss the forest for the trees. Sanders is a reflection of the deepening radicalization in this country.” To argue in this manner, Taylor depends on the perhaps willful or wishful ignorance of her readers at *Jacobin*. Sanders is a known quantity, a bourgeois politician with decades of experience behind him, who has even dispensed with his past claim to be “independent” of the two-party system. To repeat, he is not “a reflection” of the radicalization, but, along with Trump’s hysterical anti-socialism, one of the political establishment’s responses to it.

All in all, as an objective political event, the self-dissolution of the ISO reflects a milestone in the relatively seamless evolution toward pro-capitalist politics of the upper middle class pseudo-left. The development, in the end, will aid the working class in differentiating between false and genuine socialists.



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