"Socialism 2019" conference: A Democratic Party operation

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This year's Socialism Conference will be held again in Chicago from July 4–7. Unlike in previous years, the International Socialist Organization is no longer an official sponsor, having voted to dissolve itself in March. The conference has been handed off to the oversight of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA); the DSA-linked *Jacobin*, which has previously been a co-sponsor; and Haymarket Books, the ISO's former book publishing arm.

As the WSWS explained in the spring, the decision by the ISO to dissolve itself was aimed at removing any remaining organizational barriers to its integration into Democratic Party politics. The ISO has always functioned as an external faction of the Democratic Party. Following the extremely rapid dissolution, however, leading members seized the opportunity to enter the DSA, primarily with the aim of enforcing the foreign policy interests of the State Department and the stranglehold of the trade unions within the organization.

The DSA is now playing a critical role in providing a "left" cover for the Democratic Party, even as the entire political establishment moves to the right. There is widespread and justifiable hatred for the fascistic policies of the Trump administration, but at every turn these have been facilitated by the Democrats, including the DSA.

Just last month, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez played a critical role in ensuring passage of billions of dollars to fund Trump's concentration camps by voting to bring a House version of the bill to the flloor that contained meaningless restrictions, before Democrats caved and passed a Senate bill that removed them.

The Democratic Party has carried out variations of this strategy for decades, with Barack Obama's "Hope and Change" making way for the continuation of the wars in the Middle East, the expansion of drone assassinations and the massive bailout of the banks. Despite Bernie Sanders' occasional invocation of "socialism," in 2016 he worked to channel widespread opposition behind the campaign of Hillary Clinton, the candidate of Wall Street and the military. Sanders is reprising this role in the 2020 elections.

Amidst growing interest in socialism among young people and the eruption of class struggle internationally, the DSA, ex-ISO and other similar organizations are coming together to establish another block to genuine socialist politics.

Democratic Party politics will be expressed in different forms throughout the weekend conference. Bhaskar Sunkara, the editor and publisher of *Jacobin*, will be featured at one panel to discuss his recently published book, *A Socialist Manifesto.* The specialty of Sunkara and of *Jacobin* is to rebrand "socialism" as a return to postwar social-democratic reformism, a utopian dream that poses no real threat to the right-wing, militarist politics of the Democratic Party.

Sunkara's role was recently summed up by *New York Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg, a supporter of Hillary Clinton. "The leaders of this nascent socialist movement are trying to channel people away from [radical politics]," she said after an interview with Sunkara. "People in the DSA, Bhaskar, they're very responsible in not encouraging that sort of thing."

Sunday's closing plenary is given over to Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor for their "Care and Repair: The Revolutionary, Democratic Power of a Global Green New Deal." The "Green New Deal" has been taken up by large sections of the Democratic Party as a way of separating the fight against climate change from any opposition to the capitalist profit system.

Foreign policy issues will be addressed by Ashley

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Smith, the former member of the ISO who has been a chief supporter of the US-backed regime change operation in Syria. Smith is scheduled to speak on "China and the US: Inter-Imperial Rivalry or Class Struggle and Solidarity?" Anand Gopal, a fellow in the International Security Program at the New America Foundation (NAF), a Washington, DC think tank with intimate state and business ties, will deliver "A Socialist View of the Arab Spring."

The interests of the trade union apparatus will be expressed most directly by Jesse Sharkey, the longtime ISO member and current president of the Chicago Teachers Union. Sharkey is chairing the main plenary session on Friday, "Welcome to Red Chicago," which features a number of Democratic Party Chicago aldermen who are members of the DSA.

In 2012, Sharkey helped shut down and betray the 2012 Chicago teachers strike, when he was vice president of the CTU. The CTU's parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers, has, along with the National Education Association, played the decisive role in isolating and shutting down the wave of teachers strikes over the past year.

The CTU under Sharkey is deeply integrated into the Democratic Party establishment in Chicago. After endorsing Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle in the recent Chicago Mayoral elections, the CTU is now working closely with Preckwinkle's opponent and the current mayor, Lori Lightfoot.

Sharkey's panel will feature three of Chicago's six DSA-affiliated aldermen: Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, Rossana Rodríguez-Sánchez and Jeanette Taylor. The aldermen, who are being presented as part of a "radical wave" ready to "take on corporate power," are nothing of the sort.

Ramirez-Rosa got his start working in the office of long-time Democratic Congressman Luis Gutiérrez. He only declared himself a DSA member in March of 2017, after the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders made it evident that there were opportunities to be had in combining occasional socialist phraseology with careerist opportunism. Ramirez-Rosa even received the endorsement of the Democratic Party for his reelection campaign. Rodríguez-Sánchez and Taylor both come from activist and "community organizer" backgrounds in the Democratic Party.

As significant as what will be discussed at the "Socialism" conference is what will not be discussed. None of the panels make any reference to the persecution of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, which is supported by the Democratic Party. The attack on WikiLeaks has been a central feature of the Democrats' anti-Russia campaign since the inauguration of Trump.

Assange is currently imprisoned in the UK, threatened with extradition to the United States, where he faces 175 years in prison or worse for the "crime" of exposing the crimes of American imperialism. The silence of the DSA and the ex-ISO on the attack on Assange says everything about their pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist politics.

The political forces behind the Socialism conference speak not for the working class, but for privileged sections of the upper-middle class, tied to the Democratic Party and the trade unions apparatus. Anyone attending the event looking for genuine socialist politics will be sorely disappointed.

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