

Democratic Socialists of America, Haymarket Books hold online event to boost Democratic Party amid coronavirus crisis

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On Thursday, Haymarket Books and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) hosted an online event titled “How to beat Coronavirus capitalism” featuring author Naomi Klein, Princeton professor and DSA member Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and Debt Collective spokesperson and documentarian Astra Taylor.

The event was called to paper over the role of the Democratic Party in creating conditions for the coronavirus to wreak havoc on the population of the US. Despite the meeting’s title and the left-wing pretensions of the speakers, there was hardly any reference to capitalism. The word “socialism” did not make an appearance and the Democratic Party was only referenced in favorable terms.

The pro-Democratic Party thrust of the event sheds further light on the right-wing political motive behind the decision to dissolve the International Socialist Organization (ISO), with which Haymarket Books was previously affiliated, in March 2019, with most members joining the DSA. Thursday’s speakers were so careful to avoid any allusion to even nominal independence from the Democratic Party that they could not even mention the name of the DSA, which hosted the event!

The total lack of criticism of the Democratic Party or the capitalist system was all the more notable considering the speakers’ criticism of the \$2.2 trillion corporate bailout signed yesterday by Donald Trump.

Klein, a prominent supporter of Bernie Sanders and author of the 2007 book *Shock Doctrine*, denounced “no strings attached bailouts” as “an attack on public wealth ... in the interest of the people who are already obscenely wealthy.” Astra Taylor, director of the documentary *Zizek!*, called the bill “a massive influx of corporate money.”

And while each speaker denounced Donald Trump for

securing passage of the bailout bill, no speaker made reference to the fact that the Democratic Party *unanimously* supported the bill, which provides trillions of dollars to the banks and corporations and only temporary payments to laid-off workers. The speakers’ refusal to reference that Bernie Sanders voted “yes” on this corporate boondoggle is perhaps explained by Klein’s acknowledgement that “we’ve all been part of the Sanders campaign on this call.”

Astra Taylor went so far as to openly praise “the Democrats” for “pushing for student debt relief as part of the package” in the bailout bill. Klein referenced “some hard-won elements in the bailout in the US” which “are better than what the Republicans were intending to do.”

The speakers repeated various obvious criticisms of Trump’s handling of the crisis, echoing those already made by the same Democratic Party leaders who have enthusiastically embraced Trump’s bill.

At one point, Klein said, “Yes, we need to focus on Trump and the way his hotels will profit from this, but this is not just about Trump.” If this gave more critical listeners hope that a criticism of the Obama administration for its bailout of Wall Street and its cuts to public health and social programs was forthcoming, such hope was dashed when Klein continued by criticizing low-hanging fruit like Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Vice President Mike Pence.

Each speaker referenced the impact of the 2008 financial crash. Yamahtta Taylor explained, “The 2008 financial crisis was really one of these moments of revelation” which showed “the ways that bankers and corporatists around the world destroy the global economy, destroy ordinary peoples’ lives and get away with it.” Klein said the Republicans had a “disgraceful track record of profiting off of the last global crisis.”

But no speaker acknowledged that it was the Obama administration and the Democratic Party that did the lion's share of the work on behalf of Wall Street, following in the footsteps of the Bush administration, overseeing the \$700 billion bank bailout and refusing to lift a finger to halt or even slow the foreclosure of four million Americans' homes. When Obama took office with a majority in the House and a supermajority in the Senate, the administration appointed bankers to its cabinet and extended Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy. But the name "Barack Obama" was absent from the event in its entirety.

As for programmatic proposals, the speakers had absolutely nothing to offer. Expressing the middle-class attitude of those living in relative privilege who are completely separated from the reality confronting the working class, Astra Taylor proclaimed that victims of the coronavirus crisis should take action by "making zero payments" on student loan debt. This, she said, was not only "incredibly easy to do," it was also the way "to build a new kind of economic power." Don't pay your bills ... if only workers had thought of this brilliant solution!

To the extent the speakers put forward any actual political program, this was expressed most clearly by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, who said: "The old Occupy [Wall Street] formulation still has great resonance, of the one percent and the 99 percent. How do we build on the connection and solidarity between the 99 percent that puts us in a situation where our protests are not just viable but effective?"

This perspective of subordinating the class interests of the bottom 90 percent of the population—the working class and more precarious layers of the middle-class—to the interests of the wealthy "next nine" percent, forms the basis of pseudo-left politics. As a matter of the relations between classes, there can be no "solidarity" between the affluent sections of the upper middle class for whom Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor speaks and the masses of people who now confront unemployment, eviction and the prospect of poverty.

The speakers attempted to create such "solidarity" between social layers with antagonistic class interests by relying on the most vapid catchphrases of pseudo-left and postmodernist politics.

For example, Klein proclaimed that "our interdependence is becoming more visible" and called for "a truly regenerative economy based on care." Astra Taylor explained to viewers that "you are not a loan" and urged the need to "reach across this distance and

aggregate our power." The speakers made reference to the need to "unpack" various concepts, with Astra Taylor explaining the solution lies in "thinking a lot about language."

Typical of some graduate student seminars, but completely worthless in reality. Here a word must be added about the unserious character of the event, in which speakers laughed and joked amongst themselves as the death toll rises. Klein said more than she intended when she said she is "obviously incredibly privileged" before laughingly inviting her dog "Smoke" to appear on camera.

What is really required to save the lives of tens of millions of people is the socialist program based on the class struggle put forward by the Socialist Equality Party.

The SEP calls for the enactment of a plan to nationalize the major industries, provide sick leave on full pay to all genuinely nonessential workers, coronavirus protection at work for all essential employees, and using trillions of dollars in government funding, procured through taxes on the rich, to produce the medical equipment required to save lives and to protect against the spread of the virus.

We demand an end to all sanctions and trade war measures to ensure an internationally coordinated response to a disease that does not respect the arbitrary borders of the nation state system.

We do not anticipate that the capitalist governments will enact such lifesaving measures. To this end we call for workers to organize rank-and-file committees in their workplaces, neighborhoods and schools to carry forward these social demands, enforce closures and shutdowns and guard against the implementation of police-state measures that the ruling class intends to keep in place long after the disease has passed.

This is the perspective—the total opposite of that put forward by the DSA and Haymarket Books—that the Socialist Equality Party will elaborate on Sunday, March 29 at 1 PM at its online forum, "The Covid-19 pandemic: Capitalism and the making of a social and economic catastrophe." We encourage all readers to attend this critical international meeting.



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