

As COVID-19 pandemic exposes failure of capitalism, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shifts to the right

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In the 2018 Democratic primary election for New York's 14th Congressional District seat in the US House of Representatives, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), defeated the fourth-ranking Democrat in the House, Congressman Joseph Crowley. The upset victory generated massive media coverage and made her one of the highest-profile political figures in Washington.

Ocasio-Cortez's campaign was largely orchestrated by a political action committee called Justice Democrats, whose stated aim was "to create a left-wing populist movement to support alternative Democratic candidates" who were "ideologically aligned" with the organization's core values.

The promotion of Ocasio-Cortez was pushed most heavily by the DSA, which went so far as to proclaim her election and that of a handful of other "progressive" Democrats "the rebirth of the American socialist movement."

There was no substance to the claim that the election of Ocasio-Cortez was a "transformative event." As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, "[A]nyone who suggests that her victory marks a shift to the left in the Democratic Party should be told, in no uncertain terms: Curb your enthusiasm! The DSA is not fighting for socialism, but to strengthen the Democratic Party, one of the two main capitalist parties in the United States."

Less than 18 months later, the analysis of the WSWs is being fully borne out by Ocasio-Cortez herself. The freshman congresswoman has moved to ingratiate herself with the Democratic Party establishment, dismissing leading "progressives" on her staff who were instrumental in her election, and, most recently, abandoning the majority of the Justice Democrats-backed "insurgent" candidates.

The shift of Ocasio-Cortez to the right comes at the very point that the global coronavirus catastrophe is demonstrating the bankruptcy of the capitalist system and discrediting all of its political parties and representatives. As illusions that have persisted for decades among masses of people shatter in the face of the criminally negligent and incompetent response of the ruling class to the pandemic, Ocasio-Cortez seeks to restore the credibility of and shore up support for the Democratic Party.

She is doing so under conditions where the Democratic Party just voted with virtual unanimity in both houses of Congress to pass the Trump administration's massive corporate bailout, which

funnels more than \$6 trillion dollars to cover the losses of the corporations and banks from the pandemic, and then some, while providing only limited and temporary assistance to workers who are losing their jobs and sources of income.

On Monday, *Politico* published an article headlined, "AOC breaks with Bernie on how to lead the left," which outlines Ocasio-Cortez's shift to the right. It states:

Of the half-dozen incumbent primary challengers Justice Democrats is backing this cycle, Ocasio-Cortez has endorsed just two. Neither was a particularly risky move: Both candidates--Jessica Cisneros in Texas and Marie Newman in Illinois--were taking on conservative Democrats who oppose abortion rights and later earned the support of several prominent national Democrats.

Ocasio-Cortez endorsed Sanders and made joint appearances with him before the Vermont senator halted active campaigning. But among those candidates Ocasio-Cortez is not backing is Cori Bush from St. Louis, whom Sanders has endorsed. Bush was one of four candidates featured in last year's Netflix documentary *Knock Down the House*, which touted the supposed transformation of American politics through the election of "progressive Democrats," first and foremost, Ocasio-Cortez. She flew out to St. Louis shortly after her 2018 victory in New York to campaign for Bush, whom she called her "sister" in "the fight."

The *Politico* article continues:

Ocasio-Cortez's reluctance marks a break with the outsider tactics of the activist left, represented by groups like Justice Democrats. This election cycle, the organization is trying to boot not just conservative Democrats but also some liberal Democrats and to replace them with members who are more left-wing. In other words, to replicate what it pulled off against Rep. Joe Crowley in 2018 by recruiting Ocasio-Cortez...

Ocasio-Cortez's endorsement moves are not a fluke but part of a larger change over the past several months. After

her disruptive, burn-it-down early months in Congress, Ocasio-Cortez, who colleagues say is often conflict-averse in person, has increasingly been trying to work more within the system. She is building coalitions with fellow Democratic members and picking her fights more selectively. *Politico* notes that Ocasio-Cortez's break with Justice Democrats comes on the heels of her dismissal of two top aides in her congressional office, including her chief of staff, Saikat Chakrabarti (one of the cofounders of Justice Democrats), and her communications director, Corbin Trent.

The removal of the two aides came after a series of public disputes on Twitter between Chakrabarti and leading House Democrats. In one instance, Chakrabarti criticized Democrats who voted to fund Trump's border wall, referring to them in a tweet as "the new Southern Democrats." Around the same time, Chakrabarti also tweeted that Representative Sharice Davids from Kansas was among a group of Democrats voting "as a block to criminalize immigrants."

The official House Democratic Caucus Twitter account responded to Chakrabarti: "Who is this guy and why is he explicitly singling out a Native American woman of color?" This was followed by a series of public back and forth denunciations between the House Democratic Caucus Twitter account and Chakrabarti.

Both of the top aides have since been replaced with more entrenched political operatives. Ocasio-Cortez's new communications director, Lauren Hitt, has worked for many Democrats, including former Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper and former Texas congressman Beto O'Rourke, both of whom were early contestants in the race for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, running as "moderate" alternatives to Sanders.

James Carville, a top strategist for Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign and a right-wing critic of Sanders during the primaries, told *Politico*: "I've observed her. I think she's really talented, that she's really smart. Maybe she is—I don't speak for her—coming to the conclusion that she wants to be part of the coalition."

Neera Tanden, president of the pro-Democratic think tank Center for American Progress and a longtime Hillary Clinton aide, called Ocasio-Cortez's shift "a sign of leadership."

Despite Ocasio-Cortez's snubbing of their slate of candidates, Justice Democrats aides continue to promote the congresswoman, saying in a recent statement that Ocasio-Cortez remains the most "anti-establishment" Democrat in Congress. Her brief tenure in Congress has already demonstrated that her politics are entirely compatible with those of the Democratic Party establishment and entirely incompatible with socialism. Within days of her primary victory, she disavowed all "isms." In a revealing interview with NBC News' Chuck Todd last year, she was asked if one could be a socialist and capitalist at the same time, to which she replied that she thought it was "possible."

She quickly repudiated previous criticisms of Israel, pledged her support for US "border security," and voted for the US war budget.

She has lined up behind the Democratic Party's anti-Russia campaign and joined the sickening praise of arch warmonger John McCain following his death.

Only a few weeks ago, Ocasio-Cortez lovingly called Pelosi the "mama bear of the Democratic Party." When multi-millionaire "Mama Bear" Pelosi ushered Trump's corporate bailout through the House last week, Ocasio-Cortez failed to go through with a threat to stall passage of the bill by calling for a roll call vote, demonstrating her subservience to the financial elite that runs both big business parties.

While the political form of Ocasio-Cortez's shift to the right involves a distancing of herself from the Justice Democrats and the Sanders campaign, there are no principled differences between the Sanders wing and the Democratic Party leadership.

Sanders' role in the presidential campaign is essentially the same as that of Ocasio-Cortez in Congress. With the support of the DSA and similar groups, Sanders is seeking to keep social and political opposition and growing anti-capitalist sentiment, to which he appeals with talk of "democratic socialism," "political revolution" and the "billionaire class," within the confines of the Democratic Party. In 2016, he concluded his campaign by supporting the right-wing, pro-war candidacy of Hillary Clinton, and he has already made clear that he will support the eventual right-wing candidate of the Democratic Party in 2020 as well.

Both Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez, in their own political maneuvers, demonstrate the fraud of their central claim: that the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the world, can be transformed into an instrument of progressive change.

Workers and young people who were under the mistaken impression that Ocasio-Cortez represented some sort of opposition to the status quo, or even a force for socialism, must draw the necessary conclusions. She and her fellow "progressive" Democrats speak not for the working class, but for privileged sections of the middle class. The fight against inequality and capitalism will not come through such figures, but in irreconcilable opposition to them and the pseudo-left politics they promote.



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