

An Open Letter to Maria Svart, National Director of the Democratic Socialists of America

David North
22 May 2021

Maria Svart
National Director
Democratic Socialists of America
May 22, 2021

Dear Ms. Svart,

On May 17, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that during the previous week members of the Democratic Socialists of America had used Twitter to post and disseminate statements and memes celebrating the 1940 assassination of Leon Trotsky, the leader of the 1917 October Revolution and founder of the Fourth International.

As documented by the report, written by Eric London, those involved in these posts and retweets are not politically inexperienced members of the DSA. Rather, as London wrote:

“The DSA members celebrating Trotsky’s assassination include elected national office holders and leaders of its youth wing (YDSA), branch chairs, leaders of campus clubs and prominent DSA podcasters, as well as contributors to the *Guardian* and DSA-affiliated media outlets such as *Jacobin* magazine.”

Among these leading DSA members are:

1. Nickan Fayyazi, a member of the National Coordinating Committee of the YDSA and co-chair of its UC Berkeley Chapter.
2. Jake Colosa, a member of the New York City DSA steering committee.
3. Alex Lawson, a Vermont DSA organizer.
4. Honda Wang, a DSA Organizing Committee member in lower Manhattan.
5. Kenzo Shibata, a prominent DSA member in Chicago.
6. Brandon Henriquez, co-chair of the DSA Silicon Valley branch.
7. Nate Knauf, a former member of the DSA National Electoral Committee.
8. Guy Brown, a DSA National Political Education Committee member and co-chair of the Charlotte, North

Carolina DSA.

9. Blanca Estevez, a member of the DSA National Political Committee.

10. Nate Stewart, a member of the YDSA National Coordinating Committee.

11. Alexander Hernandez, co-chair of the DSA Immigration Rights Group.

12. Austin Binns, a member of the DSA National Electoral Committee.

13. Cole Schenley, co-chair of the DSA branch in Erie, Pennsylvania.

14. Kayleen Pena, a member of the DSA Organizing Committee in New York City.

15. Michael Lumpkin, a member of the DSA Los Angeles Labor Committee.

The involvement of leading members of the DSA in this anti-Trotsky campaign clearly indicates that it was a coordinated response to the WSWS’s criticism of Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez, which had been read by thousands of DSA members. Rather than attempting to reply to the WSWS with legitimate arguments, the DSA leaders descended to the level of political pornography. A tweet by Ben Davis, a prominent DSA member in Washington, D.C., featured a drawing of the assassin preparing to strike Trotsky from behind with an ice pick. Davis added the caption, “Clear out the wreckers” — thereby invoking the very words used by Stalin to sanction the murderous terror he unleashed in the Soviet Union in 1936.

The assassination of Leon Trotsky was the culmination of savage repression between 1936 and 1940 that targeted the socialist working class and intelligentsia. Within the Soviet Union, Stalin’s decision to eradicate socialist opposition to his regime resulted in approximately one million executions. The victims included not only the Trotskyist opposition, but all those who had played a significant role in the October Revolution and the early years of the Soviet Republic. The Stalinist terror claimed the lives of major Soviet writers,

scientists, and artists.

Beyond the borders of the USSR, the GPU murder machine killed thousands of socialists in Spain, including the leader of the POUM, Andreu Nin (who was tortured to death), and Trotsky's secretary, Erwin Wolf. The ferocity of Stalinist repression of socialist opponents of the bourgeois Popular Front government is described in meticulous detail in Burnett Bolloten's study of the Spanish Civil War, not to mention George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. In France, the GPU assassinated Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov and the secretary of the Fourth International, Rudolf Klement. The Stalinist killings extended even into the United States. Juliet Poyntz, a member of the American Communist Party who had expressed opposition to the Moscow Trials, was kidnapped in New York City in 1937 and never seen again. In 1943, Carlo Tresca, the famed Italian-American anarchist leader and opponent of Stalinism, was assassinated in New York City.

The DSA traces its history to the American Socialist Party. Notwithstanding their well-known and fundamental political differences with the Trotskyist movement, many of its most prominent leaders, including Norman Thomas, opposed the Moscow Trials. They supported the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry into the trials, chaired by the philosopher John Dewey. The Commission, after extensive hearings and investigation of all available evidence, declared Trotsky to be not guilty and denounced the Moscow Trials as a frame-up.

The stand of the Socialist Party was bitterly denounced by the Stalinists. Norman Thomas was among the principal targets of their attacks. In a speech delivered on March 18, 1938, Earl Browder, the Stalinist lickspittle who led the American Communist Party, declared that Thomas "capitulated to Hitler and joined with Trotsky. The Moscow trials have thrown a light upon all such problems, including the political degradation of Norman Thomas."

The DSA has a serious political problem. Its leadership includes individuals who unabashedly declare their solidarity with the monstrous crimes committed by Stalin and his totalitarian bureaucratic regime. This cannot be explained simply as a matter of historical ignorance. The individuals who are actively promoting the anti-Trotsky campaign are not political novices.

In fact, as Eric London's article documented, many of these individuals have connections to the Democratic Party, a bastion of American anti-communism and imperialism. Its political strategists view the Trotskyist movement — which seeks to establish the political independence of the working class from the pro-capitalist Democratic Party on the basis of a socialist program — as a formidable enemy. It fears the potential of the Trotskyist movement to attract workers and

youth who are being radicalized by the intensifying social crisis. The broad-based response to the WSWS's criticism of Ocasio-Cortez' defense of the Biden administration was seen as a confirmation of this potential.

The essential political purpose of their campaign against Trotskyism is 1) to poison the political environment within the DSA with reactionary anti-Marxist filth appropriated from Stalinism, and 2) to attract to the DSA socially backward people who are drawn to the anti-communist, chauvinistic and — let's not beat around the bush — anti-Semitic subtext of denunciations of Leon Trotsky. Judging from tweets that have been posted in support of the DSA leaders' attacks on Trotsky, the campaign is drawing around your organization extremely reactionary elements who should have no place within a genuinely progressive, let alone socialist organization.

An organization that claims to espouse "democratic socialism" must make clear that it will not tolerate statements, in any form, that legitimize threats of violence against its political opponents on the left.

The Socialist Equality Party formally requests that the Democratic Socialists of America unequivocally denounce and repudiate the Twitter posts, and statements in any other media, that revive Stalinist lies and celebrate the assassination of Trotsky. The DSA must make clear that the propagation of Stalinist lies, thereby sanctioning not only past but also future attacks on the Trotskyist movement, will not be tolerated and is incompatible with membership in its organization.

In conclusion, allow me to point out that the Socialist Equality Party, notwithstanding its political differences with the DSA, has consistently defended your party and its members against attacks from the political right. Statements in defense of Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez have been prominently posted in the *World Socialist Web Site*. In fact, we have applied this same policy toward members of the Democratic Party, such as Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, when they have been threatened with violence from the extreme right.

I await your reply.

Yours sincerely,

David North
National Chairman
Socialist Equality Party (US)



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact