Ocasio-Cortez at the Met Gala: The farce, the spectacle, and the politics

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On Monday evening, New York Congresswoman and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez accompanied some of the world's richest and most influential actors, fashion moguls and politicians at the Met Gala, one of the most prominent and exclusive social events in the world.

The Gala is an annual fundraising event to benefit the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, in New York City. Tickets start at $30,000.

The event itself is perhaps best described as a circus of the rich, with gaggles of millionaires and billionaires parading down the red carpet, one bizarre costume after another, all under the banner of "culture" and art. The goal appears to be to show off their fortunes in as dramatic and absurd a fashion as possible.

Kim Kardashian (net worth $1.2 billion), for example, showed up in a faceless, full-body black spandex morphsuit, resembling some type of Marvel villain. Incredibly, the look was hailed as the "most relevant" of the night. Rapper Lil Nas X wore a royal gold robe, covered in gold beading over an *actual* golden suit of armor, made by Versace no less.

Collectively, the price of the outfits alone was likely enough to feed a small country.

What was Ocasio-Cortez, the self-proclaimed "socialist," doing at such an event? Ocasio-Cortez explained to reporters that she was there to "kick open the doors at the Met" and "to break the fourth wall and challenge some of the institutions."

Framing her appearance as a social justice crusade, the congresswoman wore a $10,000 dress with the words "Tax the Rich" in red on the lower back half. She told reporters that her dress was made by New York-based Aurora James, a "sustainably focused, Black woman immigrant designer." Aurora James is known for her "15% Pledge" campaign, which encourages retailers and corporations to commit 15 percent of their purchasing power to supporting black-owned businesses.

Ocasio-Cortez explained to reporters that she intended to send the message: "When we talk about supporting working families and when we talk about having a fair tax code, oftentimes this conversation is happening among working and middle class people [on] the Senate floor," she stated. By attending the Gala, she was seeking to "bring all classes in the discussion" on taxing the rich.

While it is hard to believe that the Congresswoman herself honestly believes in such a ridiculous idea, the comment expresses the entire political orientation she seeks to push workers to adopt: to appeal to the rich to tax themselves.

One is expected to believe that Elon Musk was left shaking in his boots as Ocasio-Cortez gallivanted about at the Gala in her "statement" dress. There is no indication that he or any other attendee spent the evening consumed by a moral crisis. And all of the institutions of American capitalism likewise appear unshaken by Ocasio-Cortez's appearance.

As for her reference to the "discussion" among the "working and middle class" people in the Senate, it is hardly necessary to point out that the US Congress is composed largely of millionaires whose fortunes primarily come from their careers and connections in corporate America.

This latest political stunt of Ocasio-Cortez was monumentally unserious, farcical and stupid. However, it is worth examining the politics behind it.

First, Ocasio-Cortez poses absolutely no threat to the political establishment. The fact that she was even invited to such an exclusive event reveals just how integrated into, and accepted by, the ruling class she

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really is. Since her appearance, nearly every mainstream media outlet has lauded her “statement.”

Ocasio-Cortez serves merely to provide a left gloss to the Democratic Party as it shifts further and further to the right. Acutely aware of the immense social tensions brewing in US society, the ruling class relies on figures like Ocasio-Cortez to convince workers and youth that the Democratic Party can be reformed into an organization that fights in their interests.

To carry out this task, Ocasio-Cortez is permitted the occasional party-sanctioned publicity stunt that allows her to posture as left. But her real service is to cover the Democratic Party and obscure the real political issues. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in Ocasio-Cortez’s silence on the pandemic and the reopening of schools.

Far more significant than the message on Ocasio-Cortez’s dress was the message she helped de Blasio send with the holding of the Gala itself—that the pandemic is over, that all remaining restrictions are to be removed, and that New York is “back in business.”

The same day Ocasio-Cortez was attending the Gala, more than 1 million school children in New York City, including in Ocasio-Cortez’s district, were being crammed back into classrooms to become infected with COVID-19.

The reopening of schools coincided with the cutting off of federal unemployment benefits and the scrapping of the eviction moratorium, threatening millions of families with destitution and homelessness unless they send their children to unsafe schools and return to unsafe workplaces.

Ocasio-Cortez has done everything in her power to facilitate the right-wing policies of the Biden administration in relation to the pandemic. Two weeks ago she held a public event in her district, which includes part of the Bronx, to promote the unsafe return to school for children. She said nothing while at this event about the ongoing pandemic. In fact, she has remained totally silent on the growing impact of the Delta variant on the population, including the severe impact it is having on children.

The world is besieged by a health crisis of historic proportions. Millions of people have died worldwide and millions more are being put at risk. Under these conditions, what do the so-called “left” representatives of the political establishment have to offer? Ocasio-Cortez’s appearance at the Met Gala sums it up.

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