

Democratic Socialists of America falsely tout New York State 2022 electoral victories as boon for socialist politics

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31 January 2023

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is seeking to use the recent electoral victory of two DSA New York politicians, as well as the reelection of several others, to advance their integration into the Democratic Party apparatus while falsely equating their ballot success to the upswing of socialist politics in the United States.

The November elections in New York were a debacle for the Democratic Party, which lost four seats in the US House of Representatives, contributing to the loss of control of the chamber to the Republicans. At the state level, Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul narrowly survived reelection, while her party lost five seats in the State Assembly and one in the State Senate.

While the Democrats as a whole lost seats, the DSA expanded its faction of elected state officials with victories by Kristen Gonzalez and Sarahana Shrestha, bringing the total number of DSA legislators in the state to eight.

Both Gonzalez and Shrestha were elected in safe Democratic districts. Gonzalez won the primary by a margin of 30 percent in the newly created Senate District 59, containing portions of western Queens, northwestern Brooklyn, and the East Side of Manhattan. Shrestha won her primary bid in Assembly District 103 in the Hudson Valley by 3 percent. Six incumbent DSA legislators also won reelection, all of whom initially won seats in 2020, save one, Julia Salazar, who was first elected in 2018. Five other DSA candidates for the state legislature lost their races in 2022.

In a January 14th *Jacobin* article entitled “New York’s Socialist Bench Just Got Even Bigger,” Liza Featherstone promotes this expansion of DSA-endorsed legislators in state office as a historic victory that can help bring about significant reforms. But behind these claims is an attempt to consolidate the DSA’s position within the Democratic Party apparatus and to prove the DSA’s usefulness in saving the party from the crisis gripping the entire system.

Featherstone writes on the record of the DSA slate over the past two years, “[F]or a small group of neophytes, the socialists have punched above their weight. Each can point to specific legislative victories of their own... Their biggest victory as a

group was in 2021, when DSA, in coalition with other organizations, ran a grassroots Tax the Rich campaign. At a time when many New Yorkers were facing dire budget cuts, the legislators managed to save many vital public services from the austerity axe.”

She continues, “This time, the socialist slate — and DSA — aim to go bigger.” She then cites a spokesperson for the Tax the Rich campaign: “we stopped the era of austerity...Now we are fighting for an era of abundance.”

In fact, far from stopping the “era of austerity,” the Democratic Party at all levels is advancing attacks on the working class amid the most profound social crisis in decades. The assistance provided by the DSA in this has been illustrated most prominently at the national level, where DSA members in Congress played a direct role in suppressing workers’ struggles and funding the imperialist war machine at the expense of desperately needed social programs.

In early December, Congress overwhelmingly passed legislation to outlaw strike action and impose the terms of a rotten labor contract on 120,000 railroad workers across the country. Three out of four DSA House members voted in favor of that bill. In the Senate, Bernie Sanders ensured the legislation would pass before the strike deadline, joining the entire Senate in the unanimous approval required to expedite the bill.

In May 2022, the entire slate of DSA Congress members quietly backed a bill that gave \$40 billion to escalate the US/NATO war against Russia. In October, the Congressional Progressive House Caucus—to which the congressional DSA slate belongs—retracted a statement it had issued to president Biden which criticized the Ukraine war effort, all within 24 hours of its initial signing.

The open support for pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist policies comes as the DSA leadership maneuvers for a more thorough integration into the official Democratic Party apparatus and access to leadership positions. To this end, the DSA has seized upon a longstanding strategic rift between factions of the New York Democratic Party in order to promote elements that it sees as more cooperative with its aims. It

calculates that an alliance with this “Progressive” wing will bolster its bid for influence over the party leadership as a whole.

In the *Jacobin* piece, Featherstone writes, “On the one hand, the centrist Democrats seem more resistant to compromise with the Left, and often, more focused on fighting socialists than in defeating Republicans. Yet focusing on the socialist issues... could also help with the latter cause.”

What Featherstone refers to as “socialists’ issues” are in fact liberal reformist campaigns. “Tax the Rich,” for example, is a call embraced by a layer of billionaires and promoted at Davos and other gatherings of the super-rich. The Democratic Party is nonetheless incapable of advancing such initiatives while simultaneously satisfying its core constituency on Wall Street.

Far from seeking to mobilize the working class against the political representatives of big business, Featherstone and the DSA are essentially making a pitch to the centrist Democrats, arguing that the DSA is vital for the electoral success of the party.

The rotten character of the maneuvers within the New York Democratic Party was exemplified in the 2021 ouster of former Governor of New York Andrew Cuomo utilizing a right-wing, #MeToo-style political takedown, in which DSA and DSA-linked politicians played a role. The replacement of Cuomo by Kathy Hochul, whom Featherstone now cites as an obstacle to the DSA’s agenda, was previously heralded as an acceptable compromise by the party faction which opposed the former governor.

At the time, Featherstone promoted illusions that Hochul was willing to “work with socialists” and justified her right-wing record supporting police, writing, “there is no one ‘working-class’ view on policing, but so far, the ‘defund the police’ message could complicate NYC-DSA’s efforts to build a mass electoral base.”

In an interview last November in the *Intercept*, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez elaborated on the call to rebuild the party infrastructure in New York State to stave off electoral defeats. “Cuomo may be gone, but his entire infrastructure, much of his infrastructure and much of the political machinery that he put in place is still there,” she said. “I think that, given how progressives really organized and helped deliver that margin [for Governor Hochul’s narrow victory], I think that there very much is room for a conversation to be held here about how we can restructure how the party is selected and established.”

Along similar lines, Ocasio-Cortez, has called for the Chairperson of the New York Democratic Party, Jay Jacobs, to resign. On November 14th, an open letter was published declaring Jacobs as unfit to serve as party Chair, signed by dozens of Democratic Party politicians at state, county, and city levels. The signatories included all incumbent DSA politicians in New York state.

Alongside these maneuvers, the DSA is reaffirming its bonafides as a faithful and responsible faction within the Democratic

Party. An article by Chris Maisano in late 2022 in *Socialist Forum* succinctly summarizes the outlook of dominant sections of the organization. Maisano writes that the DSA must try to prevent a repeat of January 6th by “joining coalitional efforts to support local- and state-level Democrats against Republicans in general elections, even when those Democrats are not part of our movement.” He continues, “For the foreseeable future, we are left with continued contestation of Democratic primaries and uneasy relations with factions in the Democratic coalition who are opposed to many of our goals.”

Underscoring the DSA’s service to the Democratic Party establishment, earlier this month, Democratic US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a long-time bag man for Wall Street, applauded Ocasio-Cortez’s touting of the organization’s recent electoral victories.

The DSA’s growing integration into the Democratic Party has triggered a crisis in the organization, as many of the tens of thousands who joined the DSA in the past several years did so because they opposed the pro-capitalist policies of the Democratic Party. The pretense of the DSA’s oppositional stance has crumbled as the Biden Administration seeks to rescue capitalism amid an intractable social and political crisis.

Three years into the pandemic and nearly one year into the proxy war in Ukraine, millions around the country confront mass illness coupled with a dire economic situation of skyrocketing housing costs, stagnating wages and an inflationary crisis that threaten to decimate workers’ living standards. The past year has seen an upsurge in struggles among workers, including most recently among 7,000 nurses in New York City. On the other hand, it has also seen the continued cultivation of far-right forces in the US and internationally.

Under these conditions, there exists increasingly little operating space for the DSA—or any other organization attempting to reconcile the working class’s interests and capital—to mask the true nature of bourgeois democracy. The more than century-old question of reform versus revolution has been supplanted by the more immediate problem of revolution or counterrevolution.



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