

The March 18 anti-war rally and the dead end of “pressuring” the Democratic Party

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On March 18, a coalition of organizations held a rally in Washington, DC and other cities to oppose the US-NATO war against Russia. The principal groups behind the protests included the ANSWER Coalition and Code Pink, along with the Democratic Socialists of America “International Committee,” People’s Forum and a variety of other tendencies.

Behind the demagoguery and bluster, the perspective advanced by the speakers was a thoroughly bankrupt one: placing pressure on the Democratic Party, which is spearheading the war. The speeches made no effort to explain the historical background of the war or its fundamental driving forces.

With its variations, the line was: If enough people would rally on the White House lawn and chant loud enough, the American president would hear them, call up Vladimir Putin, and negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine.

The “people in Congress are not representing us,” declared Code Pink’s founder Medea Benjamin. “We have to be louder” and “demand that they represent us and call for peace talks... Join us as we pressure the White House and Congress.”

Biden and the “people in Congress” are not escalating the war out of some mistaken policy that they will shift if only there is enough pressure. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was instigated by the US and NATO, who have sought to use it to pursue the military defeat of Russia, itself a prelude to a broader conflict with China.

In addition to plaintive appeals to the White House to hear reason, the various speakers promoted different forms of nationalism, hailing capitalist politicians like Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and Brazilian President Lula Da Silva. Other speakers promoted African nationalism, Filipino nationalism, etc.

This is in line with the politics of the a number of the principal organizers, including the Workers World Party, the Party of Socialism and Liberation and their various offshoots, including the International Action Center and ANSWER, whose national director, Brian Becker, concluded the rally. The PSL split from the Workers World Party in 2004. The Workers World Party was founded by Sam Marcy in 1959 after he broke from the Socialist Workers Party on the basis of an adaptation to Stalinism and its nationalist offshoots of Castroism and Maoism.

Several of those prominently featured at the rally and the subsequent teach-in actually called for a vote for Biden in the 2020 elections, including Benjamin and anarcho-syndicalist Noam Chomsky.

On September 23, 2020, Chomsky and Benjamin signed an open letter condemning those who refused to vote for Biden in swing states against Trump.

Not voting for Biden in swing states won't bring on a revolution. Not voting for Biden in swing states will not make anyone the slightest bit more progressive, radical, or revolutionary. Not voting for Biden in swing states will not grow or solidify the ranks of opposition. But not voting for Biden in swing states risks immeasurably enlarging the obstacles that opposition will thereafter face.

The letter asserted that Trump represented such a grave danger to the social and democratic rights of the population that it was necessary to support Biden no matter what.

In fact, Trump and the Republicans have only been

strengthened by Biden's administration, which as the WSWS warned has spent the past two years seeking to politically rehabilitate the co-conspirators in the January 6 coup. The reactionary and militarist policy of the Democrats in office, moreover, has given Trump and the fascist right the ability to posture as opponents of war.

However much they might attempt to deny it, having called for a vote for Biden, Chomsky and Benjamin bear political responsibility for the actions of the administration, including the US-NATO war against Russia.

Then there was Jorge Rocha, the co-Chair of the North Brooklyn Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and a member of the steering committee of the DSA "International Committee," which is a caucus within the DSA. Rocha devoted most of his remarks to covering up the role of the DSA.

Rocha claimed: "The organization I'm part of, DSA, has been doing so much anti-war international organizing. From the very beginning we have been against this war, despite what had been claimed."

Rocha then proceeded to read from the February 26, 2022 statement by the DSA: "DSA reaffirms our call for the US to withdraw from NATO and to end the imperialist expansionism that set the stage for this conflict."

This pro-forma statement has been followed by a barrage of pro-war propaganda from the DSA, which has gone so far as to hold meetings where individuals financed by the military have promoted the Ukraine war.

On May 10, 2022, all four DSA members in Congress voted to approve Biden's request for \$40 billion in military and financial aid for Ukraine. In October, after a letter they and others signed suggesting a negotiated settlement was sharply criticized in the media, the same DSA members stood by silently as its lead author, Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, withdrew the letter and declared that the only way to end the war is with "Ukrainian victory."

Overall, the rally was of a thoroughly middle class character. Its political perspective was oriented not to the broad mass of the population, the working class, but to sections of the ruling class, including the capitalist ruling elites in Russia, Venezuela, Syria and other countries. Through some sort of conglomeration on this

basis, they claim that it is possible to oppose imperialism.

In addition to what was said, what was not said was also significant. The demonstration took place amid a mass insurrectionary movement of the working class in France, and a mounting strike movement throughout Europe and the United States. But the word "strike" did not appear in a single one of the speeches at the rally. There was no reference to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and even the word "inflation" was not mentioned.

Those leading the demonstration have nothing to say to the working class, which was also reflected in the turnout. Despite the fact that more than 200 organizations endorsed the demonstration, only about 500 people participated.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) critically endorsed the demonstration, while explaining its opposition to the political perspective of the organizers. "War will not be stopped by appeals to the ruling class and its governments to 'negotiate' an end to the conflict," the IYSSE wrote, "which is a central demand of the March 18 protests... The only viable social basis for opposition to imperialist war is the international working class, whose exploitation is the source of all profit and all wealth in society."

The rally organizers refused requests by the IYSSE to speak because they did not want any discussion of this perspective, or any criticism of their political record.

Protests against the war are necessary and will develop and expand as the consequences of the war are understood by broad masses of the population. The fight against imperialism, however, requires a turn to the working class, not the bankrupt petit-bourgeois and Stalinist politics on display on March 18.



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