

# DSA in damage control after state legislator Mike Connolly calls for raising rent on Massachusetts workers

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Massachusetts State Representative Michael Connolly (D-Cambridge) announced on Monday that he was leaving the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) after his vocal support for raising rent on Massachusetts workers caused a crisis in the organization.

Connolly, a self-described “progressive” Democrat and “democratic socialist,” had been a member of the DSA since 2016, when he was first elected to the Massachusetts statehouse with the organization’s endorsement.

Earlier this year, the Democratic Party-run Boston City Council passed Democratic Mayor Michelle Wu’s fraudulent “rent control” plan, which continues to raise already exorbitant city rents. The policy allows for rent hikes up to 10 percent for around 55 percent of Boston renters, while buildings constructed over the last 15 years, as well as landlords who own six units or fewer and live on-site with their tenants, have no restrictions.

Connolly endorsed the proposal. The “just cause eviction protections” in the bill are riddled with loopholes and exemptions, including eviction for non-payment of rent, for which the majority of evictions in Boston are carried out. In other words, all Boston renters will continue to face enormous rent hikes and evictions.

Hundreds of thousands of workers’ lives will be impacted by this bill, which will pave the way for many future evictions. Boston is one of the most expensive cities in the country. Average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment is close to \$3,000. Last year, there were about 115,600 people living at or below 100 percent of the poverty line in Boston, a rate of 17.9 percent. A recent study by SmartAsset found that making \$100,000 a year in Boston feels more like bringing home \$46,588. According to the 2021 Census, median household income in Boston was \$81,744. Evictions filed in Boston are up nearly 75 percent from last year, back to pre-pandemic levels.

Connolly’s entire political career as a DSA elected official has consisted of providing a “left” cover for the Democratic Party in Massachusetts as the latter enacts right-wing, anti-worker policies. His tenure in office went virtually uncriticized by the DSA for the last seven years because it illustrated not a

departure from the organization’s line, but the reactionary role of the DSA in American politics.

Connolly left the DSA on his own accord after a group of DSA members submitted a motion calling for his expulsion. This was quickly met with an apologetic amendment from eight Boston DSA members opposing his expulsion but calling for his censure instead.

The authors of the amendment wrote, “We find that expelling a member for having moderate, social democratic politics is not justified. By and large Connolly’s statements and actions through the years – including actively working against fellow DSA candidates and campaigns – stem from this underlying political approach. *And for better or worse, this approach is shared by many other Boston DSA members, rather than representing conduct on Connolly’s part that would justify expulsion.*” (Emphasis added).

This is an important admission. Connolly is not actually in substantial disagreement with the principles or policies of DSA by supporting rent hikes.

In a July 10 statement responding to Connolly’s departure, the leadership of Boston DSA stressed that it did not move against Connolly. “The motions to expel and censure Connolly were brought forward by members of the chapter, and not by the chapter’s elected leadership body,” the statement read.

Faced with the continued exposure of Connolly’s kowtowing to the Democratic Party establishment, sections of the DSA put forward the expulsion motion in an attempt to perform a face-lift operation to ensure the organization remains an effective tool for strangling the opposition of workers and youth to capitalism.

Connolly’s role exposes the DSA as a pro-capitalist, anti-working class organization. Mayor Wu’s plan to raise rent 10 percent a year received uncritical support from Connolly, who recently declared in an interview with GBH News that Wu was “doing an extraordinary job.” Speaking to *The Intercept*, Connolly said, “It was preposterous to think that the state legislature would approve a plan to the left of Boston’s, so [DSA-backed legislators] decided to back it.” Connolly has advocated for housing reform that “all parties” benefit from,

including “landlords and owners to earn a fair rate of return on their investments.” Wu’s bill certainly ensures a continued return on their investments.

Representing the upper-middle class layers that dominate Cambridge, Connolly has supported right-wing Democrats, including Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey. He twice voted for established Democrat Ron Mariano for Massachusetts as House speaker. He endorsed incumbent Democratic state representative Christine Barber over DSA challenger Anna Callahan in 2020, and he praised the new leader of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Ed Augustus.

According to campaign finance reports, Healey’s campaign for governor received close to \$200,000 from the real estate industry, on top of over one million dollars combined donations from the finance and insurance industries, lawyers and unspecified lobbyists. As governor, Healey has repeatedly expressed opposition to even the phoniest “rent control” policies and has opposed the right of Massachusetts teachers to strike. In a recent television interview with GBH News, Connolly stated, “I support Governor Healey, I think she is an extraordinary leader for our Commonwealth.”

Ed Augustus, recently appointed state housing secretary by Healey, oversaw a dramatic increase in housing prices and homelessness as the city manager of Worcester from 2014 to 2022. Today, nearly 50 percent of Worcester renters are cost-burdened, paying more than a third of their income on rent and utilities. Connolly tweeted, “As a member of the Joint Committee on Housing and a Co-Chair of the #HousingForAll Caucus, I can’t wait to get to work with Secretary Augustus!”

Responding to the expulsion motion, Connolly wrote on Twitter, “We must put people over purity and unity over unanimity.” He initially declared that he would oppose the expulsion motion at the July 23 Boston DSA General Meeting. However, five days later, he announced that he was leaving the DSA.

Connolly has received support from a slew of Democratic Party hacks, including Joe Caiazzo, a Massachusetts-based political consultant, Rhode Island state director for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign and top aide for the Bernie Sanders 2020 campaign. Caiazzo told *Politico*, “At the end of the day, politics is about compromise. If you’re not willing to compromise, then you don’t get to play on the team. And if you can’t play on the team, then there’s no way to ever win.”

These are the rotten politics of the DSA and all its elected Democratic Party representatives. Since its founding in 1982 as the “left-wing of the possible,” the DSA has worked feverishly to capture and strangle popular opposition to capitalism. The last four decades have witnessed an uninterrupted lurch of the entire political establishment to the right. The Democratic Party rejected its association with limited social reforms and oversaw vicious attacks on the working class at home and abroad through the prosecution of unending wars and implementation

of mass austerity at home. Today, the Biden administration is spearheading the barbaric war against Russia in Ukraine and attacks on the working class at home to pay for US imperialism’s drive for global domination.

In this context, confronted with mass opposition in the working class to soaring inequality and war, the DSA was promoted in 2015, working alongside Sanders’ 2016 campaign, to reign in the leftward movement of millions of workers and youth.

However, the organization today stands exposed for what it is, an upper-middle class arm of the Democratic Party, having nothing to do with socialism. Over the last three years in particular, the DSA has proven itself to be a warmongering, strike-breaking, pro-imperialist organization of the first order.

Connolly’s treachery pales in comparison to many of his “progressive” colleagues. DSA representatives in Congress, including most prominently Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, voted to ban a potential national railroad strike last year. DSA members of Congress also voted to fund the imperialist slaughter in Ukraine by providing tens of billions of dollars to the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. Every dollar spent on the war will be paid for through attacks on the working class.

In 2021, New York Democratic Congressman and DSA member Jamaal Bowman voted to provide Israel’s military with \$1.1 billion for its ongoing brutal repression of the Palestinian population. DSA’s National Political Committee rejected calls from the membership to expel Bowman. “Progressive” Democrats have also provided cover for the Biden administration’s murderous COVID-19 policies and various austerity packages marking the beginning of devastating cuts to vital social services.

Connolly’s politics are the politics of the DSA, which is nothing more than a faction of one of the oldest bourgeois parties in the world. Confronted with an escalating crisis resulting from the ongoing exposure of this right-wing arm of the Democrats, sections of the upper-middle class layers that comprise the DSA attempt to strike a new “left” pose.

This latest episode only underscores the necessity for workers and youth to break with the Democratic Party and all its fake-left operatives. Only an independent, historically grounded, international socialist perspective and program can advance the interests of the working class everywhere.



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