“Left-wing Vitriol is Unwarranted”: Jacobin defends Ocasio-Cortez and denounces socialist criticism of DSA

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The Democratic Party is responding with extreme sensitivity to a series of exposures of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) published by the *World Socialist Web Site* about its convention, in which delegates resolved to remain a faction of the Democratic Party and voted against holding DSA elected officials accountable for supporting imperialist war and voting to illegalize strikes. The WSWS’s coverage of the DSA convention was read or viewed tens of thousands of times, including on several prominent YouTube shows where the articles were read aloud.

Honda Wang, a Democratic Party operative who became a leading DSA figure after advising capitalist politicians at the pro-Clinton Schoen Consulting firm, put out the call on Twitter: “The left media ecosystem needs to cover DSA convention because the only group pushing coverage is WSWS and people are believing their made-up bulls--- [sic] because they’re the only ones reporting on it.”

Wang’s suggestion was liked or retweeted by many prominent figures in the Democratic Party, including former Bernie Sanders National Press Secretary Briahna Joy Gray (now at *The Hill*), *Labor Notes* editor Dan Dimaggio and Massachusetts Democratic State Assemblyman Mike Connolly, who was a DSA member until this summer. DSA staffer Michael Gronchowski added, “Honda’s right. We need left media and DSA members to write about DSA convention and other important events. Don’t let the WSWS write left history.” Zurie Pope, a member of the *New York Times* “talent pipeline” program, commented, “I’m actually in the process of writing about DSA and YDSA convention for *The Nation*.”

Jacobin: “Left-wing vitriol is unwarranted”

The DSA-aligned publication *Jacobin* was the first to answer the Democratic Party’s call with an August 16 article titled, “AOC and the Squad’s List of Left-Wing Accomplishments is Quite Long,” by Branko Marcetic. The subtitle reads: “As with any elected official, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Squad should be criticized when needed. But left-wing vitriol is unwarranted: it ignores the Squad’s many progressive accomplishments and their legislation’s aid to activist campaigns.”

“It’s tough being a member of the Squad these days,” Marcetic begins, noting that the DSA and its congressional slate are being “savaged” by “the left” and that “even committed socialists question what the point of the Squad has been.”

He continues: “This is hard to square with both a closer analysis of Ocasio-Cortez and the Squad’s record, and with the picture painted by progressive groups and unions that work with them. Have they occasionally fallen short? Sure. But the reality of the Squad’s accomplishments and movement importance is far more positive than the one-dimensional, gloomy narrative that has become popular in some corners of the Left.”

Marcetic presents his article as a triumph of investigative journalism, writing on Twitter that he “did something novel and did reporting, actually talking to advocacy orgs, unions, activists,” and adding that “they painted a different picture” than the DSA and Ocasio-Cortez’s critics. Marcetic follows *Jacobin’s* longstanding editorial policy of not mentioning the WSWS. Those he interviewed for the purpose of propping up Ocasio-Cortez are either trade union bureaucrats, Democratic Party-aligned think tank employees, Democratic Party staffers or leaders of non-profits who operate in the orbit of the Democratic Party.

Marcetic’s article has been greeted with rapture by the Democratic Party and was promoted on Twitter by almost the entire leadership of the DSA, leading Democratic groups like the Justice Democrats and Millennials for Bernie Sanders, and Democratic-aligned media figures like MSNBC’s Mehdi Hasan, who has 1.3 million followers.

For all the anticipation and hype, the mountain labored and brought forth a mouse. Marcetic’s article reads like a tired press release for the Democratic Party. Defensive and nervous in style, Marcetic tries very hard to present the most boring and standard maneuvers of Democratic politicians as though they were acts of revolutionary sacrifice. It would be a tough task for even a skilled journalist to present Ocasio-Cortez as a socialist, but this article shows Marcetic is no journalist. He is simply a hired hand taking assignments from the Democratic Party.

Promoting Pelosi and the Democratic leadership in Congress

As proof of the DSA elected officials’ exemplary records in Congress, Marcetic tries to present the DSA’s representatives as fighting valiantly in the halls of power and securing real victories for working people. But all Marcetic can scrounge up are four examples of legislation they helped pass in the House. Of these, three are window dressing for extremely reactionary laws, while the fourth, a proposed repeal of the Clinton-era ban on public housing, failed in the Senate and never became law.

The other three of Marcetic’s examples are: (1) “One successful 2019 amendment cut $5 million from the Drug Enforcement Administration budget and redirected it to treatment programs for the opioid crisis,” (2) Ocasio-Cortez’s collaboration with far-right Republican Dan Crenshaw to pass an amendment which “mandated the Pentagon study the therapeutic uses of MDMA and hallucinogens,” and (3) a “2019 victory against mass

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surveillance, when they forced through the end of the Patriot Act's Section 215," a reactionary provision allowing state surveillance and retention of "business records."

By presenting passage of the budgets for the DEA and the Pentagon as "victories," Marcetic has only given another example of the role played by the DSA in legitimizing American imperialism and the state's repressive apparatus.

Five million dollars is a pittance in terms of the DEA's total budget. It is just 0.001 percent of the amount Ocasio-Cortez and the rest of the DSA slate (save Rashida Tlaib) gave to the arms manufacturers to provide Ukrainian fascists with missiles, bombs, artillery shells and guns for a war against Russia that poses the danger of nuclear catastrophe. Nor is there anything socialist about pressuring the Pentagon to fund a study on the use of hallucinogens, as shown by Ocasio-Cortez's collaboration with the fascist Dan Crenshaw, whom she helped legitimize in the process. In the days before Trump's coup attempt of January 6, 2021, Crenshaw signed a legal brief that was submitted to the Supreme Court advocating the seating of pro-Trump electors.

As for the claim that Ocasio-Cortez and the Squad "forced through the end" of Section 215 of the Patriot Act in 2019, Marcetic uses ambiguous language to mask the fact that the provision only *expired*. The Electronic Frontier Foundation noted after the expiry that these were "modest reforms," explaining: "Although Section 215 and the two other provisions have expired, that doesn't mean they're gone forever," because Congress can reinstate them during the next national security scare. The expiry does not prevent the intelligence agencies from using many loopholes to gather and store private data, the EFF explained.

Role of the DSA in Congress: Promote and legitimize right-wing Democratic leadership

While they have nothing but superficial legislative results to show for their time in office, the DSA's elected representatives have expended most of their time and political capital promoting the right-wing leadership of the Democratic Party.

In February 2019, Ocasio-Cortez praised Nancy Pelosi, saying, "I think she's showing people who's boss and I very much understand that she's in an extraordinarily difficult position." In July of that year, Pelosi praised Ocasio-Cortez, calling her "a very gracious member of Congress." Pelosi acknowledged that the DSA is a part of the Democratic Party, saying: "A family, you have your differences. You're still a family. Does your family agree on everything?" Pelosi added that there are "some personality issues" between her and Ocasio-Cortez, but "the rest, they're minor."

The Squad provided the votes that right-wing New York Democrat Hakeem Jeffries needed to become the leader of the Democrats in the House of Representatives. At the time, Ocasio-Cortez, speaking on behalf of the Squad, said, "What was important today was to send the message that we were united behind Hakeem Jeffries as the new minority leader, that there would be no defections, that Democrats are here, we're not going anywhere."

Ocasio-Cortez pledged the Democratic Party would "stay 100 percent united" no matter what, stating that "we absolutely have differences," but the Squad is "willing to put that aside" to help the Democratic Party maintain unity.

This critical political support helped the right wing of the Democratic Party endow itself with false "left" credentials, which facilitated the ramming through of its reactionary agenda, which included massive increases to the Pentagon budget, an expansion of the state's repressive apparatus, and the suppression of the class struggle. To the Democratic Party, this political service of tamping down social opposition far outweighs the miniscule impact of the minor legislative changes Marcetic praises the Squad for implementing. The Democratic leadership allowed them to be implemented so they could have *something* to point to when subjected to left criticism. It is for this reason that Ocasio-Cortez was given a prominent committee leadership position earlier this year.

AOC signs meaningless "letters" to Trump and Biden

Marcetic downplays the Squad's support for US imperialist war against Russia, while presenting various letters to the president as though they are masterstrokes of socialist advocacy. He says it is wrong to minimize "the impact that even just letters" to presidents have on changing American foreign policy and the policies of US-backed regimes.

In American capitalist politics, one of the standard means by which politicians stake out positions and promote themselves is to write letters to the president urging him to take various positions on questions of imperialist foreign policy. Almost always written in a respectful tone, such letters are a method for different factions of the ruling class to debate which foreign policies are most advantageous to American imperialism.

Marcetic writes:

> All or some of the Squad have signed onto letters condemning Donald Trump's sanctions on and threats of military intervention in Venezuela; calling for the lifting of sanctions on the country, as well as on Cuba and Iran; denouncing repression by Ecuador's right-wing, Trump-supported government; warning the Organization of American States (OAS) away from further coup shenanigans in Bolivia's 2020 election; and threatening to condition military aid to Israel. Ocasio-Cortez's name was the common denominator on all those letters.

Marcetic says this shows "the Ukraine war is not the only pressing foreign policy issue," a pathetic attempt to downplay the dangerous significance of the Squad's votes to send tens of billions of dollars worth of weapons to Ukraine. Last year, Marcetic wrote an article criticizing the Squad for revoking a letter calling for negotiations with Russia, saying the move was "dangerous at any time, let alone when nuclear tensions are high." Today Marcetic's employers have asked him to change his mind, and he has obliged.

The letters signed by the DSA's congressional representatives and sent to Biden are profuse with praise for the president. In a May 10, 2023 letter on Cuba, the signatories said, regarding Biden's immigration policies, that "we are heartened by recent steps that your administration has taken in this direction." This came after Biden essentially banned those crossing the US-Mexico border from applying for asylum, a fact the signatories diplomatically decided not to mention.

In a January 30, 2023 letter to Biden calling for certain restrictions on security assistance to the coup regime in Peru, Ocasio-Cortez and 19 other Democratic signatories wrote, "We look forward to working with you on ensuring the protection of democracy in Peru," promoting the more than a century-old lie that US imperialism's goal is to promote democracy in Latin America.

In a March 7, 2019 letter to Trump on Venezuela, the Democratic signatories made clear their opposition to US sanctions was from the standpoint of upholding US imperialist domination in the country, calling

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sanctions and threats of military action "counterproductive as they play into the Venezuelan government's narrative," and "help shore up Maduro's support base."

As for the claim the DSA's congressional representatives attempted to restrict the role of the OAS and US imperialism, three of the Squad voted for the 2023 consolidated budget, which includes funding for the Pentagon, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Border Patrol and OAS. Tlaib voted "present" while Ocasio-Cortez cast a token vote of opposition, as her vote was not needed to secure passage.

AOC endorses Biden despite role in orchestrating coups in Latin America

Marcetic also credits Ocasio-Cortez for making public statements against US involvement in the right-wing coups in Bolivia in 2019 and Peru in 2022, for introducing an amendment "banning the transfer of weapons and crowd control equipment to the [Bolivian] coup regime, language that made it into the bill that passed the House," and also for helping "prohibit any Pentagon involvement in anti-narcotic aerial fumigation operations" in Colombia.

None of Ocasio-Cortez's proposals mark a change in American foreign policy in anything other than the most limited and tactical sense. Throughout history, American imperialism has pivoted from imposing brutal dictatorships to a publicity-oriented "democratic," face-saving approach, which facilitates the pivot back to dictatorship. Ocasio-Cortez's proposed measures do not even go as far as the measures of the Democratic-controlled Congress of the 1980s, which illegalized US support for the far-right contras after revelations of the contra's horrific war crimes against the workers and peasants of Nicaragua provoked widespread anger worldwide. As the contra experience showed, the Pentagon and intelligence agencies largely ignore such proscriptions, anyway.

Far more important to the Biden administration and the imperialist Democratic Party is the political support given by Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA to the imperialist establishment. By endowing the administration with "left" bona fides, the DSA has facilitated Biden, the CIA and the State Department's operations around the world, including their continued support for the coup regimes in Bolivia and Peru.

But the broader question is: If Ocasio-Cortez is an opponent of the Biden administration's role in Latin American coups, as Marcetic claims, why has she been praising Biden for three years, and why did she endorse Biden for re-election before the primaries even began? Why did she attack left-wing criticism of Biden as "privileged" and racist in a March 2021 interview in the DSA's publication *Democratic Left*?

In April 2021, barely a year after the coup in Bolivia, she said at a virtual town hall, "I think a lot of us expected a much more conservative administration," and added that "the Biden administration and President Biden have definitely exceeded expectations that progressives had." She said he had been "very impressive" and had helped pass "progressive legislation." "It's been good so far," she added.

In February 2022, she said, "I would enthusiastically support him if he were the Democratic nominee." In June 2022, with the US/NATO war against Ukraine raging, she told CNN's Dana Bash, "I believe that the president has been doing a very good job so far." In July 2023, a half year after the coup in Peru, she formally endorsed Biden for president regardless of any primary challenger, stating enthusiastically, "I think he's done quite well, given the limitations that we have."

Other members of the DSA slate have also endorsed Biden, with Greg Casar saying he is "on board" with Biden's reelection. Ilhan Omar, who is supported by the DSA, said she was "of course" supporting Biden's re-election campaign. In the run-up to the 2022 midterm elections, Omar refused to call for a change in party leadership, including on a potential 2024 ticket: "I actually don't think it's helpful for us to be out talking about change in leadership as we are fighting to keep the House, extend the Senate in this crucial and critical midterm where all of our freedoms are on the ballot."

On top of this, Ocasio-Cortez's PAC—Courage to Change—has supported a number of right-wing Democrats in Congress, including former intelligence agents and military officers like Elaine Luria, Jared Golden, Abigail Spanberger and Elissa Slotkin, who are the most vicious proponents of the US war against Russia and of American military and intelligence operations across the globe. Slotkin, who was a CIA agent, was also endorsed by Liz Cheney. Courage to Change also supported Haley Stevens, who was chief of staff for Barack Obama's auto industry task force at the time it slashed newly hired autoworkers' wages by 50 percent.

Ongoing support for Israeli suppression of Palestinians

Marcetic urges readers not to understate the "contributions" DSA elected officials have made to "shifting the Israel-Palestine discourse in the United States."

Ocasio-Cortez and the squad have not "shifted discourse" on Israel and Palestine. They have capitulated to American imperialism's full-throated support for the Israeli apartheid state, while inconsistently making mild reproaches of the suppression of the Palestinians. Even as the Israeli government devolves into a fascistic dictatorship, Ocasio-Cortez refuses to take a clear position against it.

Calling Israel an "apartheid state" is meaningless, since Ocasio-Cortez's actions speak louder than her words: She refused to vote against providing $1 billion in missiles for Israel's Iron Dome project, helping the far-right Israeli government free up massive resources for the suppression of the Palestinian people. She is so fearful of upsetting the Israeli lobby as well as coming under left-wing criticism that she uses non-sensical language to deliberately avoid taking any position. On a podcast in 2021 she said:

> I think that when we talk about peace, centering people's humanity, protecting people's rights – it's not just about the what and the end goal which actually gets a lot of focus, but I actually think it's much more about the how, and the way we are coming together, and how we interpret that what, and how we act in, you know, the actions we take to get to that what."

Marcetic's claim that Ocasio-Cortez contributes to "shifting the discourse" is as meaningless as her statement itself. A socialist's responsibility is to tell the truth. Ocasio-Cortez and Marcetic are constitutionally incapable of doing so.

DSA slate joins anti-Chinese hysteria

Marcetic also praises Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA for taking a purportedly principled position vis-à-vis US imperialism's hostility to

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China. He writes, “Most recently, as anti-China fervor has taken over even progressive Democrats, the Squad were the only seven members of Congress to vote against a bill escalating Trump’s erosion of the One China policy, and all but one voted against creating the GOP’s anti-China select committee.”

As their votes for war against Russia show, the DSA’s congressional leaders are following the Democratic Party line that the main enemy is presently Russia, while war against China is being prepared for the near future. While claiming the Squad opposed “anti-China fervor,” Marcetic refuses to mention that the entire DSA slate supported House Resolution 104 in February 2023, whose title was “Condemning the Chinese Communist Party’s use of a high-altitude surveillance balloon over United States territory as a brazen violation of United States sovereignty.”

By supporting the resolution, passed amid a hysterical media campaign over the downing of a Chinese balloon over the US, the DSA representatives all resolved that Congress “(1) condemns the PRC’s brazen violation of United States sovereignty; (2) denounces the CCP’s efforts to deceive the international community through false claims about its intelligence collection campaigns in violation of United States sovereignty; (3) [and] determines that it should be the policy of the United States to promptly and decisively act to prevent foreign aerial surveillance platforms, including those directed by or connected to the CCP, from violating United States sovereignty.”

Marcetic’s refusal to mention this major episode of the DSA unanimously joining the McCarthyite anti-China hysteria shows that his method of writing is dishonest. He is not performing an act of objective journalism, but completing his assignment to write a piece of Democratic Party propaganda.

Jacobin denounces socialist criticism of Ocasio-Cortez

Marcetic also presents Ocasio-Cortez as an ally of the trade unions and describes her as playing a heroic role in securing stimulus checks through the CARES Act, which he absurdly describes as providing “universal basic income,” without mentioning that it was a massive corporate bailout.

As for Ocasio-Cortez’s role in the pandemic, in August 2021, she played a disgusting role by handing out backpacks to children to encourage them to go back to school, even though the pandemic was still raging and sickening thousands of children in New York City alone. Making herself a spokesperson for the Biden administration’s unsafe “back to school” campaign, she said, “We are out here making sure [the children] start off the school year with fresh backpacks and school supplies. So that everyone is really ready to rock this upcoming school year!” The last article on her official House website referencing the pandemic is from January 2022.

Notably absent in Marcetic’s article is any mention of Ocasio-Cortez and the Squad’s silence on Biden’s relentless attack on immigrants. The words “immigrant,” “border,” “detention,” “ICE,” “asylum,” and “Title 42” do not appear in his article.

Marcetic concludes by praising the “more nebulous” role Ocasio-Cortez and the Squad have played in “building up pressure on those in power, expanding the bounds of what’s possible, and creating momentum for change.”

The DSA and its elected representatives in Congress are not helping encourage the development of left-wing opposition, their role is to trap growing opposition within the Democratic Party and provide the Democrats with credibility to conduct vicious attacks on the working class at home and abroad. Above all, their role is to block the development of a genuine socialist movement independent of and hostile to the Democratic Party and the entire capitalist political establishment.

Marcetic’s article is only the latest example of this. For this reason, he tries to dress up standard Democratic Party politicians as though they are left-wing, downplaying their votes to crush the railroad strike, provide consistent political support for the right-wing of the Democratic Party, and support for imperialist war. Marcetic concludes by suggesting that those who are critical of the DSA suffer from “left pessimism.” He says, “Left-wing scrutiny of the Squad and particularly Representative Ocasio-Cortez has steadily veered from constructive criticism and needed pressure to a kind of caricaturish vitriol.” This, he says, is “a recipe for disaster.”

Here, Marcetic is simply following the playbook of Ocasio-Cortez herself, who denounced socialist criticism of the right-wing Biden in her March 2021 interview in DSA’s *Democratic Left*. Parroting this line, Marcetic makes the only true statement that appears in his entire article: It is a fact that *Jacobin* and the DSA believe “left-wing vitriol is unwarranted” against Democratic Party politicians who vote for imperialist war and to crush railroad strikes. This is, after all, the position the DSA officially endorsed at its convention in early August. It is the role the DSA has played for 40 years.

The defensive tone and dishonest content of Marcetic’s article confirms that the DSA is mired in profound crisis, and that the Democratic Party is deeply anxious about the growing interest in genuine socialism represented by the Socialist Equality Party and *World Socialist Web Site*. Those interested in building a mass socialist movement that is irreconcilably *against* the 200-year-old Democratic Party should contact us today.

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