

At CNN town hall

Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez plead for GOP to negotiate, downplay Trump's dictatorship

Jacob Crosse
17 October 2025

On October 15, CNN hosted a 90-minute “town hall” with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez devoted to boosting the Democratic Party amid a government shutdown now entering its third week. The discussion served above all to conceal the advanced preparations for dictatorship underway in the United States.

Nearly every question focused on what Democrats and Republicans were doing to reopen the government. Neither CNN host Kaitlan Collins nor the two politicians uttered a word about Trump’s repeated threats to invoke the Insurrection Act and impose martial law. The words “fascism,” “national guard,” “Chicago,” “ICE,” “impeachment,” or “dictatorship” were never spoken.

Throughout the event, Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez touted their bipartisan credentials and their readiness to work with Republicans to reopen and fund Trump’s government.

A viewer unaware of current events would not know that heavily armed Border Patrol Tactical Units recently tear-gassed a Chicago neighborhood after federal agents deliberately caused a car accident at an intersection. Nor would they know that Blackhawk helicopters and assault rifle- and chainsaw-wielding immigration police stormed a South Side apartment complex, forcing citizens and immigrants alike — including naked children — into the street in handcuffs.

In response to the first of many questions about reopening the government, Ocasio-Cortez urged viewers to “put pressure” on Republican Speaker Mike Johnson to “pick up the phone.” “What is normal is to negotiate, come to a compromise, pass the bill,” she said. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member did not specify any conditions for reopening the government, deferring entirely to party leadership: “We need to make sure, as a member of the party, we put negotiations in the hands of our party’s leadership. With Hakeem Jeffries, if he says it’s no, it’s no.”

Later, Ocasio-Cortez likened the shutdown to a “team sport.” Echoing Barack Obama’s infamous description of the 2016 election as an “intramural scrimmage,” she emphasized the need for both parties to “come to something we can agree with” and reopen the government with Trump and his fascist cabal still in power. “Negotiations are all about a back and forth,” she said. “And so, this is a team sport.”

Both politicians repeatedly expressed willingness to collaborate with the most reactionary sections of the Republican Party without raising any demands to halt troop deployments to major cities or stop militarized raids that are trampling workers’ democratic rights. Responding to questions about the US military murdering people in

the Caribbean Sea and a possible invasion of Venezuela, Sanders said he was “very concerned,” but proposed no action to stop the illegal operations.

The overriding theme of the event was bipartisanship. Asked which Republicans he would work with to pass a continuing resolution, Sanders replied, “Great question, I can mention a number of them. There are some decent honest Republicans.” The first name he cited was none other than QAnon proponent and Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene:

I never thought that I would say this but you have someone like Marjorie Taylor Greene saying, “You know what, I was elected by my constituents, that’s who I am beholden to, not the president of the United States.”

So there are good Republicans out there and if Trump would leave them alone for five minutes and not threaten them with a primary if they stood up and did the right thing, I think we can make progress.

Greene is an outright fascist who supported Trump’s January 6 coup attempt and has repeatedly threatened to murder political opponents. She is a close ally of far-right militias and antisemites, and in 2022 addressed the inaugural America First Political Action Conference organized by neo-Nazi Nick Fuentes, calling on her audience to “stop the Democrats, who are the Communist Party of the United States of America.” She led the push to pass the fascistic “Laken Riley Act,” which vastly expanded the powers of the immigration police. Democrats joined Republicans in passing it during the first month of Trump’s second administration.

Ocasio-Cortez likewise touted her readiness to “work across the aisle” with her “Republican colleagues,” citing her joint bill with Republican Rep. Nicole Malliotakis to expand maternal health and reauthorize the “Healthy Start” program. “In terms of bipartisan legislation on healthcare, I’m more than open to doing that,” she said. “But it’s not just about talking the talk — we got to walk the walk.”

More than halfway through the event, Collins asked whether Trump deserved “credit” for the fraudulent “ceasefire” in Gaza. Both Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez, leading campaigners for Biden’s aborted 2024 reelection bid, sought to whitewash their support for Israel and their role in suppressing the mass anti-genocide movement, blaming both Trump and Joe Biden for the slaughter. Sanders boasted that he and

Ocasio-Cortez “spent a long time with President Biden trying to make the case” for limiting US arms to Israel.

Ocasio-Cortez claimed, “I’ve given President Biden hell about this.” When or where this “hell” was “given” was not elaborated. Perhaps it was in-between numerous television and podcast appearances where she praised Biden’s “leadership” amid the bombardment of Gaza, or when she urged her supporters to “be adults about the situation” and support the war criminal. Maybe it was after Biden dropped out of the race and Ocasio-Cortez endorsed his handpicked successor, Kamala “the most lethal fighting force in the world” Harris, the same Harris who Ocasio-Cortez falsely claimed at the 2024 Democratic National Convention was “working tirelessly” for a ceasefire.

In an attempt to reestablish credibility with workers and youth who oppose the genocide and the complicity of both big business parties, Sanders said, “The United States essentially funded this war... In other words, the United States has been from day one, under Biden, under Trump, in the driver seat.”

But he drew no conclusions from this damning admission, one that indicts both parties, including himself, and the entire political system of American capitalism.

In a revealing moment near the end of the broadcast, Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez praised DSA member Zohran Mamdani and called on other Democrats to back his campaign, in the name of “party unity.”

Ocasio-Cortez, who presented herself as an “outsider” when she first campaigned for the House in 2018, no longer pretends to be anything other than a loyal Democratic Party soldier. She said:

I believe in endorsing the nominee of the party after the primary has resolved itself. I endorsed Bernie in 2020 when he ran against President Biden. President Biden won that nomination and we all had to come together and do the work of supporting our party’s nominee in order to make sure that we win. And so I do worry about the example it sets when our leaders do not support the party nominee, because in the future we will need folks to rally around the presidential nominee. And if that nominee is more moderate, or if that nominee is more progressive, we are setting the precedent of not endorsing the nominee unless we agree with them. I worry about what example that sets. So I have made myself very clear about that.

Sanders openly presented Mamdani’s campaign, like his own misnamed “Fighting Oligarchy” tour, as a means of channeling popular anger over decades of Democratic betrayals back into the party and electoral politics:

He said:

No great secret, got a Democratic Party that is in the doldrums right now, everybody acknowledges that. You got a candidate in New York City, Zohran Mamdani, the guy is running an extraordinary campaign. This should be the kind of candidate that Democrats want in every state in the country.

Of course, Alexandria is right, he is the Democratic nominee, how do you not support the Democratic guy? But more importantly... he’s a great candidate... he should be the model.

Warning against the growth of genuine socialist and anti-capitalist sentiment, Sanders added:

We got political problems in this country, people are giving up on the political process. He is giving people excitement, getting them involved. I would like to see that take place in 50 states in this country.

This, of course, is about a candidate who has devoted the bulk of his campaign to reassuring the financial oligarchy, the party tops and the police that he poses no threat to the capitalist status quo.

Though the Trump administration has declared war on “antifa” and vowed to use the “war on terror” model against its political opponents — including groups tied to the Democratic Party such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) — neither Sanders nor DSA member Ocasio-Cortez mentioned the issue.

At the end of the event, Sanders briefly referenced the “No Kings” demonstration, noting that House Speaker Mike Johnson had called it a “Hate America” rally. Sanders insisted it was a “Love America” event before pivoting back to health care subsidies. He made no call for people to turn out for the nationwide anti-Trump and anti-dictatorship protests.

Both politicians made fleeting references to “authoritarianism,” but neither proposed any action to oppose it. This silence is deliberate. It reflects the Democratic Party’s conscious strategy of downplaying the danger of dictatorship and chloroforming the population as the capitalist crisis deepens and the Trump regime prepares for mass repression.

The two “progressives,” like the Democratic Party as a whole, represent the same financial oligarchy that controls Trump and the Republicans. The critical conclusion that flows from this is the need for the working class and youth to break from the Democratic Party and the two-party system and build a mass independent movement to bring down Trump and replace him with a workers’ government based on socialist policies, beginning with the expropriation of the oligarchy and transformation of the banks and corporations into public utilities under democratic workers’ control.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

He continued: