

The politics of Hasan Piker: Radical rhetoric in service of the Democratic Party

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In late March and early April, social media personality and livestreamer Hasan Piker spoke as part of the campus campaign tour of Michigan Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed, provoking debate in the mainstream media and Democratic Party establishment. Piker was subject to congressional condemnation for supposed “antisemitism” and anti-imperialist statements, with the most virulent supporters of Zionism accusing him of being a “terrorist supporter.”

The denunciations from both parties have drawn wider interest in Piker. His YouTube channel has 1.88 million subscribers; his videos consistently reach hundreds of thousands of viewers; and his Twitch broadcasts are among the most watched on the platform.

But what does Hasan Piker actually represent politically? He represents a certain social and political type—who can gain a widespread following due to oppositional statements but lacks a perspective rooted in a historical and class analysis—that is easily absorbed into the milieu of the Democratic Party.

Origins and political appeal

In the case of Piker, he has grown up within this milieu. After graduating from Rutgers University in 2013, he worked for The Young Turks (TYT), founded by his uncle Cenk Uygur, a Democratic Party politician. Piker launched his streaming career on Twitch in 2018 and left TYT in 2020 to focus on livestreaming full-time. His political profile was elevated following the start of the Israeli genocide campaign against Gaza in late 2023. His vocal opposition to Zionism and defense of oppressed people’s right to armed resistance made him a target of right-wing attacks.

Through his online media activity, Piker has accumulated several million dollars in personal wealth and a \$2.7 million home in West Hollywood.

With his record of support for the Democrats, Piker can hardly be described as a “dangerous radical.” He has never failed to support the Democratic Party’s candidate in any election, declaring in one broadcast that he “never urged people not to vote. I have never told people to vote for the Green Party. Ever. Ever. Ever.” He quickly walked back even a passing suggestion that he would vote third party in 2028.

In an interview with *Pod Save America*, Piker explained his aims plainly: “I understand that politics is in some ways the art of the possible. My expectation is never going to be someone coming out and advocating seizing the means of production. I’m a reformist.” He even acknowledged his critics’ characterization: “Many to my left will say ‘you’re feeding revolutionary potential back into the Democratic Party, you’re a shepherd for the Democrats.’” Indeed.

Piker summarized his prescription for political action: “We have to

consistently show our discontent over and over again by way of protest, but also by pressuring the Democratic Party. By trying to unseat bad Democrats and replacing them with Democrats that will do the right thing.” The “left flank candidates” he promotes, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ro Khanna, Shawn Fain, Chris Van Hollen, are on record as supporters of American imperialism, having voted for war budgets or voiced support for NATO’s interventions. The record of every figure Piker supports is ultimately a record of war and austerity.

Most revealing is Piker’s treatment of New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, whom he repeatedly cited as proof that a “left flank” politician could win office and exert genuine pressure from within the system. The record of Mamdani’s first months in office demolishes this claim entirely. Mamdani made repeated visits to the White House to forge a political “partnership” with Trump, a president who had called for the execution of Democratic legislators just one day before Mamdani’s first visit. Piker’s response was to call it “Awesome,” framing the collaboration in terms of pop-psychology and claiming Mamdani had skillfully “wooded” Trump. At no point did Piker raise the obvious question: What does it mean for a supposed socialist mayor to be building a political partnership with a fascist president waging an illegal war of aggression at the very moment that war is beginning?

Falsifying Lenin to defend support for the Democrats

As workers and youth become radicalized and move far to the left of the Democratic Party, Piker has repeatedly referenced Lenin’s *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* to justify his support for the Democrats. His method is to strip quotes of their revolutionary content and transplant the hollowed-out shell into a completely different political context.

Piker cites Lenin’s line, “We must not regard what is obsolete to us as something obsolete to the masses,” transforming it from an argument for revolutionary participation in parliament—to dispel illusions and prepare the road to the seizure of power—into an argument that Lenin advocated “exhausting all readily available options” while faithfully operating “within the confines” of bourgeois politics.

Piker argues directly: “In the absence of an established, viable working-class alternative third party, you have to work within the confines.” He then fuses this position with its opposite, implying that refusing to have confidence in the Democrats means believing revolution will happen spontaneously without organization. By fusing the two positions together, rejecting the Democratic Party can be smeared as believing in a spontaneous revolution achieved through abstention.

Contrary to his claims of “raising consciousness,” Piker actively discourages his audience from fighting to introduce socialist politics in the

working class, by portraying workers as backward and reactionary. He declares there is “no class consciousness in this country” and characterizes American workers’ views as “f***ing distorted and out of whack.” Even after calls for a general strike emerged from below in Minneapolis in response to ICE terror, Piker insisted the US is “a country with no class consciousness whatsoever.”

Socialists, following Lenin and Trotsky, take the opposite approach: “Our tasks don’t depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the workers.” The Bolsheviks did not abandon independent organization because Russian workers were backward. They built the party precisely to overcome that backwardness. Piker has inverted the method entirely, using the limitations of working class consciousness as an argument against building the very instrument necessary to overcome it.

Hasan Piker’s Stalinist slanders against Trotskyism

In response to growing interest in Trotsky’s ideas among his audience, Piker has engaged in slanders of Trotskyism drawn from the neo-Stalinist milieu cultivated by the DSA. In a May 6 livestream, he remarked: “There was another guy ... that decided that the peasant class would never play a formative role in any sort of revolution and would unironically be counterrevolutionary. He spent the rest of his f***ing days in Mexico.”

This is the Stalinist slander of “Trotsky’s underestimation of the peasantry,” one of the oldest and most thoroughly refuted fabrications in Marxist history. Trotsky himself demolished it as early as 1923, writing in *The New Course*: “One would seek in vain among my adversaries for an analysis of this question, for facts, quotations, in a word, for any proof. Ordinarily, their argumentation boils down to allusions to the theory of the ‘permanent revolution,’ and to two or three bits of corridor gossip.” That description fits Piker’s rant with surgical accuracy, 100 years later.

Trotsky’s actual argument was never that the peasantry was inherently counterrevolutionary. His position was that the peasantry could not play an *independent* revolutionary role — that if it did not follow the proletariat, it would follow the bourgeoisie.

The theory of Permanent Revolution explains that in the epoch of imperialism, the national bourgeoisie in backward countries is tied to imperialist capital and landed property, rendering it incapable of carrying out the tasks of the democratic revolution. The proletariat must therefore assume the leading role. And crucially, once the proletariat takes power, it cannot stop at the democratic tasks: the logic of its class position drives it toward socialist measures. It was this perspective, vindicated by Lenin’s own shift in the April Theses of 1917, that guided October itself.

Piker has also repeated the slander that Trotskyism “leads to neo-conservatism,” citing figures such as Irving Kristol and David Horowitz. This is a fabrication. Kristol was an early Shachtmanite who was never a Trotskyist; Horowitz was long associated with the Pabloite IMG. The true political lineage of the neoconservatives runs through Max Shachtman, who broke with Trotsky in 1940 over the defense of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers’ state. Shachtman’s “third camp” theory refused to defend the USSR against imperialism. Trotsky fought bitterly against this capitulation in the final months of his life, documented in *In Defense of Marxism*.

Ironically or not, it is the political heirs of Shachtman who are the founding figures of the Democratic Socialists of America, the organization whose candidates Piker consistently promotes. Shachtmanism is not a form of Trotskyism but a petty-bourgeois tendency that rejected Trotskyism’s most essential political positions. It is not Trotskyism which leads left-radicals to neo-conservatism but their

abandonment of Trotskyism.

“Hasanabi Doctrine”: Nuclear proliferation as anti-imperialism

A telling consequence of Piker’s hostility to the working class is his conception of “anti-imperialist” politics. The “Hasanabi Doctrine” advises leaders of bourgeois nationalist regimes to acquire nuclear weapons to deter American imperialism: “1. Get Nukes. 2. Do not give up your nukes. 3. If you’re accused of having nukes, drop everything immediately and find some nukes.”

This framework accepts the nation-state as the permanent and unchallengeable arena of political struggle. The working class has no role to play. By defining “anti-imperialism” solely through the military posture of rival capitalist states—not the struggle of the working class to overthrow the imperialist system—Piker makes an apology for whichever capitalist regime happens to be in conflict with Washington. This does not arm the working class with an understanding of imperialism but counsels weaker bourgeois states on how to maneuver within the imperialist framework.

Because Piker writes off the working class as a revolutionary force, he has no choice but to look to capitalist states as the vehicle of anti-imperialism. Trotsky responded to such arguments, writing, “A ‘socialist’ who preaches national defence is a petty-bourgeois reactionary at the service of decaying capitalism. Not to bind itself to the national state in time of war, to follow not the war map but the map of the class struggle ...”

The viability of the “Hasanabi Doctrine” is in any case completely breaking down under the weight of the crisis of world capitalism and rearmament. The Trump administration’s war against Iran marks a new stage in imperialist barbarism and the beginning of a global war for the redivision of the world. The gang of criminal oligarchs will not be stopped by maneuvers of various capitalist states. Supporting nuclear weapons as a means of opposing imperialism means total hostility toward the working class and is a dead end for the struggle against war.

Conclusion

Piker is a media personality whose social function is to capture the leftward energy of a generation and redirect it into the thoroughly safe channels of the Democratic Party and its satellite organizations. The fact that this role is performed with profanity, a veneer of anti-capitalist rhetoric, and even with quotes from Lenin and Marx, does not change its fundamental character.

The WSWS has been unequivocal in its opposition to the attacks on Piker, including the recent moves by the Trump administration to target him and Medea Benjamin for traveling to Cuba, as well as Piker’s earlier detention and interrogation at Chicago O’Hare Airport in May 2025. That is part of the broader fascist offensive against free speech.

But at every decisive juncture when the question of what to do arises, Piker’s answer is: Support the left Democrat, back the DSA candidate, vote for the Democratic Party.

The anger that draws hundreds of thousands to Piker’s streams is the anger of a generation that has watched a genocide livestreamed in real time while their governments have funded every bomb. They have entered adulthood in a world of crushing debt, stagnant wages and a two-party system that treats their lives as acceptable collateral for the profits of the wealthy. In the end, Piker’s politics are a mechanism to contain it.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality calls on young people to break completely with both capitalist parties and their agencies, and to turn to the working class as the only social force capable of stopping genocide, imperialist war and the rise of fascism. We call on all workers, youth and students to join the IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party, and take up a serious study of what Marx, Engels, Lenin and, above all, Trotsky actually argued—assimilating the theory, method and history of the Trotskyist movement.



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