

The Colorado primary and the turn toward socialist politics

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The defeat of 15-term incumbent Diana DeGette in Tuesday's Democratic congressional primary in Denver, Colorado by Melat Kiros, a 29-year-old first-time candidate and member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is another expression of the broad political radicalization developing in the United States.

In the statewide Senate primary, former DSA member Julie Gonzales, who was outspent nine to one, won 46.6 percent of the vote and nearly defeated two-term Senator John Hickenlooper. Gonzales carried the city of Denver. Senator Michael Bennet, a pillar of the Washington establishment for two decades, was defeated in his bid for the party's nomination for governor.

The Colorado results follow the primary victories one week earlier of three congressional candidates in New York City backed by Mayor Zohran Mamdani, two of them members of the DSA, the victory of a DSA member in the Democratic primary for mayor of Washington DC—tantamount to election in the US capital city—and electoral successes for candidates claiming to be “democratic socialists” in Seattle, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit and other cities.

This demonstration of mass support for socialism, in a country where socialism has been demonized by the media, the academic apologists for capitalism, the two major political parties and the government at all levels, has immense historical significance. What is taking place is a new stage in the political radicalization of ever broader layers of the population. The official narrative of American politics for the past century has rested on the claim that the United States is the one country where support for socialism was permanently foreclosed. That narrative is collapsing.

The conditions producing this shift are not difficult to identify. American society is ruled by a financial oligarchy that operates increasingly in the manner of a criminal syndicate. Workers who cannot pay their rent or repair their cars watch a president who is enriching himself, his family and his coterie to the tune of billions of dollars, while his administration rounds up immigrants, deploys troops in

American cities, wages war against Iran and Venezuela, and arms and finances genocide in Gaza.

The millions who joined the “No Kings” protests, like the millions now voting for candidates who call themselves socialists, are responding both to impossible living conditions and to the assault on democratic rights and escalating war.

This radicalization is not yet informed by scientific socialist consciousness. It is the initial product of anger over conditions produced by decaying capitalism, which is increasingly—and correctly—viewed as the source of the social crisis. One recent survey found that 62 percent of young people view socialism favorably; another found that young people favor socialism over capitalism by a margin of two to one. Confidence that the market will “sort things out” has evaporated. People have concluded, on the basis of their own experience, that the system is rigged against them.

Within the ruling class, these developments are producing enormous nervousness. Trump and the Republicans have responded to the primary results in New York and Colorado with hysterical denunciations of “communism”—a recognition, in their own way, that the shift to the left in popular consciousness poses a threat to the wealth and power of the billionaire oligarchs.

“It's the biggest threat to our country, including World War I, World War II, Pearl Harbor, September 11,” Trump posted on social media. “It's a bigger threat, potentially a bigger threat than that, because it's like a cancer that spreads, and you better stop it fast.”

A group of “centrist” Democrats has issued a manifesto reaffirming that they are “capitalists” committed to “fiscal responsibility” and “law and order.” This document refers approvingly to the McCarthyite purge of the unions and the Democratic Party, initiated in 1947 by Walter Reuther and Hubert Humphrey, as the model for a new anticommunist witch-hunt.

Representative Josh Gottheimer, a New Jersey Democrat and fervent Zionist, described as “aberrations” the victories of candidates opposing the Israeli genocide in Gaza. “We've

got to fight like hell to keep our party from being hijacked by socialists,” he said. “Most of them are bomb throwers, not problem solvers.”

It is in this context that one should read the Substack column published Thursday by economist and pro-Democratic Party pundit Paul Krugman, under the headline, “There Are Very Few Socialists in America.” Krugman undertakes to explain that the whole thing is a misunderstanding. “Very few Americans—even among politicians who call themselves democratic socialists—are really socialists,” he writes. What people actually support is “social democracy,” an ideology that is “OK with living in a mostly market-driven economic system in which some people make much more money than others.”

There is, he concedes, “a real groundswell of dismay over an economy that increasingly favors a tiny group of billionaires,” but those who say they favor socialism “are not demanding a dictatorship of the proletariat.” As for the “left-wing radicals in America,” they “have no realistic prospect of getting their way.”

This is whistling past the graveyard. Krugman is attempting to convince himself, and the privileged social layers for which he speaks, that the millions voting for candidates who call themselves socialists do not really mean it.

The DSA is the initial beneficiary of the political radicalization in America. But for all its rhetoric it has no program to address the conditions of poverty, war and attacks on democratic rights that are producing its own electoral successes. And it is a faction of the Democratic Party, linked by a thousand threads to American imperialism, so much so that its founder Michael Harrington earned the apt moniker of “State Department socialist.”

Its candidates declare that this should be a country in which the interests of working people come first. But how is this to be achieved? Through what mechanism? The monopolization of wealth and power by the oligarchy and the impoverishment of the working class are not the products of mistaken policies. They are two sides of a single process, rooted in the private ownership of the means of production and the subordination of every social need to profit.

To promise that the interests of working people will come first, while leaving the banks, the corporations and the capitalist state untouched, is to promise a reconciliation of the wolf and the lamb.

The record of Mamdani, six months into his mayoralty, is a living demonstration of this truth. The “pragmatic” socialist has worked to shut down strikes by New York City nurses and Long Island Rail Road workers, reversed his campaign pledge on rental vouchers in the name of fiscal restraint, left the multibillion-dollar police budget intact, and

traveled to the White House to do business with Trump.

The radicalization revealed in the primary elections anticipates a movement of the working class itself, and it is on this that everything depends. History has demonstrated where the betrayal of mass expectations leads. In his election campaigns, Sanders promised a “political revolution” only to through his support behind the Democratic Party establishment, which helped create the political conditions for the rise of Trump. When the DSA candidates betray the expectations now invested in them—and they will—the beneficiary must not be the fascist right but a genuine socialist movement of the working class.

That requires the fight for a program that actually addresses the source of the crisis: the protracted decay of American and world capitalism, and the unfolding of a global imperialist war as each capitalist power seeks to bomb and kill its way out of the crisis.

The working class must establish its political independence by breaking with the Democratic Party and the entire framework of capitalist politics. It must fight for the expropriation of the financial oligarchy and the transformation of the giant banks and corporations into public utilities under democratic control; the abolition of the oligarchy’s political instruments of dictatorship and war; and the unification of the struggles of American workers with those of workers internationally.

Not one of these measures can be implemented through the existing state, which is the instrument of the oligarchy. What is posed is the question of power: Which class is to rule? The demands of the working class can be realized only through a mass independent movement culminating in the conquest of political power by the working class and the establishment of a workers’ state, which will reorganize economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The decisive question is the building of a revolutionary leadership in the working class, which fights in every struggle to develop this program and perspective. We urge workers and young people who are looking for a way to fight to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.



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