

Citing war in Syria, ISO withdraws endorsement of Green Party gubernatorial candidate in New York

By Sandy English
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On October 17, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) announced that it was withdrawing its endorsement of the Green Party candidates for New York State governor, Howie Hawkins, and lieutenant governor, Jia Lee, who ran against the Democratic incumbents Andrew Cuomo and Kathy Hochul in Tuesday's election.

The ISO justified its rupture with the Green candidates over the issue of Syria. The immediate reason given for rescinding their endorsement was the appearance in September at a Hawkins fundraiser of comedian and YouTube talk show host Jimmy Dore.

Dore has denounced the US intervention in Syria and debunked unsubstantiated claims by the Obama and Trump administrations that alleged chemical weapons attacks on Syrian civilians were the work of government forces. Washington has used these allegations to justify airstrikes directed against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, which the US has targeted for regime-change.

The ISO's right-wing attack on the Green Party is consistent with its long-standing role as an agent of US imperialism and political accomplice in a neo-colonial war that has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians, turned millions more into refugees and destroyed the country's infrastructure.

The ISO's position is in sync with that of the Democratic Party and those factions within the US military and intelligence establishment that consider the Trump administration's conduct of the US war in Syria insufficiently aggressive, and are demanding a more belligerent posture toward Assad's main ally, Russia.

In the October 17 statement, "The Independent Left Must Oppose Islamophobia," published on the ISO's website, *SocialistWorker.org*, the New York City district of the organization demanded that the Hawkins-Lee campaign "publicly clarify its opposition to the Islamophobic and Assadist views put forward by these figures."

The ISO brands as "Islamophobic" and "Assadist" anyone

who questions the role of US imperialism and its allies in funding and arming Islamist "rebels," including forces linked to Al Qaeda, and orchestrating the seven-year-long war for regime-change.

This is a reactionary slander. Opposition to US imperialism in Syria does not imply political support for the bourgeois Assad regime. The defense of oppressed former colonial countries against imperialism is a fundamental principle of the Marxist movement, regardless of the nature of their regimes.

Genuine socialists do not lend any credibility to the cynical attempts of the US ruling class to cloak its war crimes in the mantle of "human rights." Nor do they cede to the imperialists the task of settling accounts with Syria's bourgeois regime—a task that must be carried out by the Syrian working class as part of a united, international struggle of the working class against world imperialism.

Similarly, applying the term "Islamophobic" to those who oppose the long-standing use by US imperialism in the Middle East of right-wing Islamist militias and political movements as instruments for regime change and suppression of the working class is a political libel. It is of a piece with the ISO's attempt to portray right-wing terror outfits in the pay of Washington and its regional allies, led by Saudi Arabia, as the spearhead of a "democratic revolution."

In the October 17 statement, the ISO writes: "Dore's YouTube show, with its 400 thousand subscribers, is a platform for conspiratorial arguments about Syria, including the claim that the outcry against the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons is a 'false flag' operation."

By "conspiratorial arguments" the ISO means Dore's exposure of falsehoods and contradictions in the claims of the media, the Trump administration and the Democratic Party that Assad forces carried out chemical weapons attacks on civilians in 2017 and 2018. These allegations were used to justify US missile attacks on Syrian forces in

April of 2017 and again last April. The ISO article links to a video of Dore debunking the claims of a Syrian government gas attack on Idlib Province, which were used as the pretext for the April 2017 missile attack on Syria's Shayrat airbase.

The ISO has been aligned with the Green Party, a bourgeois party steeped in nationalism and hostile to any independent movement of the working class, since 2004. ISO members have repeatedly run for office on the Green Party ticket. The organization has to be well aware that among both the Greens's leaders and members there has existed a range of opinions critical of American policy in Syria for some time.

Green presidential candidate Jill Stein's running mate in the 2016 presidential election, Ajamu Baraka, for example, had spoken critically of US "human rights imperialism" and called American intervention in Syria "a classic destabilization campaign."

While supporting the Stein campaign in 2016, the ISO criticized it for failing to unambiguously back the US wars in Syria and Iraq. In August of 2016, *SocialistWorker.org* writer Ashley Smith complained that Jill Stein "has made little to no criticism of Assad."

There is no doubt that since then, the ISO has hardened its pro-war line and aggressively attacked—in the name of the Syrian "democratic revolution – anyone who opposes the US aggression in the region. Last May, *SocialistWorker.org* issued a rebuke to an article in *Jacobin*, the magazine associated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), for "casting doubt on the idea that Syrian Dictator Bashar Al-Assad used chemical weapons."

The invocation of the appearance of the comedian Jimmy Dore at the Hawkins rally, however, is a transparent pretext for breaking with the Greens. Underlying this move are real political pressures.

First and foremost among them are the recent "successes" of the ISO's political allies in the Democratic Socialists of America in fielding winning candidates for the Democratic Party, particularly in New York, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for Congress and Julia Salazar for State Assembly. The privileged upper middle class constituency to which the ISO is oriented was also drawn to the unsuccessful challenge by former TV star Cynthia Nixon to incumbent Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo. With their endorsement of the Greens, the ISO's leadership became fearful that it was missing the boat.

Nonetheless, this shift has provoked a crisis inside the ISO. The predominant layer within the organization that wanted to ditch the Greens to work with or within the DSA, that is, more openly and more directly in the Democratic Party, has encountered opposition from other elements that are concerned about the ramifications of such a blatant

orientation to the oldest capitalist party in the world.

Danny Katch, a leader of the ISO opposed to the decision, in an October 18 discussion article warns *SocialistWorker.org*'s readers and the ISO membership "not to confuse this discussion with the debates we've been having in the ISO—particularly in New York City—around left-wing Democrats like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. There are connections, certainly, but opposition to endorsing Hawkins is not an inevitable by-product of wanting to endorse Democrats instead."

Of course, the issue of an open—or slightly less open, via the DSA—turn by the ISO to the Democrats is precisely what is involved here. What concerns Katch is that the ISO's decision to break with the Greens will expose this political orientation and make it more difficult for the organization to provide a "left" gloss for its pro-imperialist politics.

He refers to a discussion in the New York ISO branch about "the growing influence on the left of supposedly 'anti-imperialist' support for dictatorships," by which he means hostility to the US military intervention in the Middle East, which the ISO supports, among broad layers of workers and youth.

Lance Selfa, another ISO leader who opposed withdrawing the endorsement of the Green Party nomination, echoes this sentiment in his own comment in *SocialistWorker.org*, arguing that the decision does "a greater disservice to the cause of 'building a new party of the left' than the shortcomings of the Hawkins/Lee campaign."

In other words, a section of the ISO fears that such a demonstrative break with the Greens will not only damage relations with a "left" bourgeois party with which it has longstanding ties, but also expose the organization for what it is: a shill for the Democratic Party

While the pressures from within the upper middle class milieu within which it operates to join in the "most important election of our lives" to battle the "Trump regime" have shifted the ISO toward closer integration into the Democratic Party, there are evident concerns within the organization that such an approach can diminish its effectiveness in providing a pseudo-left cover for the policies of the factions within the ruling class and the state with which they are allied.

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