

DSA calls US midterm elections the “rebirth of the American socialist movement”

By Genevieve Leigh
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On November 7, the Democratic Socialists of America’s National Political Committee published a statement celebrating the US midterm elections as a victory for the “left.” The statement begins: “Yesterday democratic socialists fought and won inspiring election campaigns across the country, representing the rebirth of the American socialist movement after generations in retreat.”

It continues: “While Democrats succeeded in taking back a slim majority in the House of Representatives, striking a blow to the extreme right-wing and pro-corporate agenda represented by Trump and the Republican Party, the Senate remains in the hands of Republicans.”

The DSA presentation of the elections as a blow to the right wing and victory for socialism is in blatant conflict with reality, as is the claim that the election of a handful of DSA members and a few dozen DSA-supported candidates has significantly altered the political trajectory of the United States.

Such assertions are belied by the fact that few if any of the candidates supposedly embodying the “rebirth” of American socialism actually identify themselves as socialists, and none of them advance a socialist program. They do not even put forward a serious liberal reform program. All of them are part of the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the United States, and support its core policies: war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights.

At the top of the list is DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the newly elected congresswoman from New York. After winning the primary, in which she buried her affiliation with the DSA, she moved quickly to dissociate herself not only from socialism, but from anything smacking of opposition to militarism, Zionism or the persecution of immigrants.

Within days of her primary victory, she disavowed all “isms,” repudiated previous criticisms of Israel, pledged her support for “border security,” and stood beside Bernie Sanders, nodding in agreement, as the Vermont senator endorsed the Democrats’ anti-Russia campaign. A few weeks later she joined the sickening chorus of praise for Senator John McCain, following the death of the reactionary war-monger (see: “Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders praise McCain: An object lesson in the politics of t

he pseudo-left”).

As for the other DSA-endorsed candidates cited in the National Political Committee statement, not one of them could be considered genuinely on the left, let alone socialist. Every one of the 12 nationally endorsed candidates ran and was elected as a Democrat. They are for the most part Democratic Party machine functionaries.

Vaughn Stewart, elected to Maryland’s House of Delegates in District 19, served as the policy director for Rep. Jamie Raskin’s successful campaign in 2015 and was also the treasurer of the District 19 Democratic Club and a precinct chairperson.

Gabriel Acevero, who won a seat in Maryland’s House of Delegates in District 39, writes in his “about” section that he is “committed to building a strong Democratic Party in Montgomery County.” He also boasts of his current role as president of the Association of Black Democrats of Montgomery County and his service as a District 39 precinct official.

Summer Lee in Pennsylvania’s 34th District served as a field organizer for the Pennsylvania Democratic Party in 2016.

As for their programs, issues related to war and US militarism do not appear on the websites of a single one. None of them advance a single demand for a fundamental change in the relations of production or distribution of wealth.

On his official website, Acevero calls for vaguely formulated mild reforms, such as “expanding affordable housing” and “taking care of our seniors.” In his website’s section on “defending immigrants,” he makes no call for the abolition of ICE or the end to US wars abroad that have devastated the countries from which thousands of immigrants flee every day. Instead he offers the status quo Democratic Party line that immigrants are “good for the economy” and states his support for the Dream Act.

The reality is that far from being reformed, the Democratic Party is moving sharply to the right, and on some major issues, including censorship, the war in Syria and the confrontation with Russia, is to the right of the Trump administration.

In an election campaign marked by an unprecedented appeal by Trump to fascistic forces, encouragement of racist violence, attacks on the 14th Amendment, the deployment of troops to

the border, pledges to build tent cities for detained immigrants and outbursts of fascist violence—what was the response of the Democratic Party?

It refused to defend the Central American immigrants denounced by Trump as “invaders” who threatened the safety and lives of Americans, calling the issue a “distraction.” It treated Trump’s attack on birthright citizenship, a cornerstone of the Bill of Rights, as something between a joke and an electoral ploy. It remained silent on the ominous moves by Trump toward world war carried out in the run-up to the election, including his withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, his imposition of savage sanctions against Iran and the declaration of a “New Cold War” against China.

The Democrats’ supposed focus on health care omitted any reference to earlier calls for “Medicare for all” and amounted to nothing more than the defense of the reactionary Obamacare program, which imposes higher costs for reduced services on millions of workers, while shielding the profits of the insurance and drug corporations.

During the election campaign, the Democratic Party and its media mouthpieces demanded that young people, in particular, vote for the Democrats, attempting to shame them with the libel that abstaining or voting for a third-party candidate made them complicit in Trump’s criminal policies.

This fraud was exposed even before all the votes had been tallied, when Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi, having won control of the House of Representatives, issued one statement after another pleading with Trump to allow the Democratic Party to collaborate in the implementation of his right-wing policies. The Democrats were roused to protest only when Trump fired his arch-reactionary, anti-immigrant, racist attorney general, Jeff Sessions. They called rallies to defend the former Alabama segregationist and protect the anti-Russia investigation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller from interference by Trump’s new Department of Justice head.

The incoming class of newly elected Democrats includes a sprinkling of DSA-backed purported “progressives,” but it is dominated by nearly a dozen former intelligence operatives, military officers and national security officials, as well as an enlarged caucus of right-wing “Blue Dog” Democrats. There is, in fact, no contradiction between those bourgeois politicians labeled “progressive” by the DSA, including the likes of Ocasio-Cortez, and what the WSWS has called the “CIA Democrats.” The former completely support and fundamentally agree with the latter on all basic questions.

Here is the real political lineup: The Democrats, working with the trade unions and pseudo-left organizations such as the DSA, focus their efforts on suppressing the anger and opposition of the working class to the entire political and economic set-up; they seek to collaborate with Trump and the Republicans in this effort, including through the strengthening of the police powers of the state; the DSA works to provide a

“progressive” and “democratic” gloss to this anti-working class party of Wall Street, the military/intelligence establishment and the most privileged sections of the middle class.

They are all united in their fear of a mass independent movement of the working class, which will threaten the foundations of the capitalist system. This, in fact, is the sole basis for the fight for socialism, not a reshuffling of personnel and right-wing parties in Congress or, for that matter, the White House.

This midterm election has underscored the futility of all attempts to effect progressive change through the bourgeois electoral system, itself a travesty of real democracy. After a record \$5 billion spent, most of it by billionaire oligarchs who buy politicians by the dozens, endless mud-slinging, lying campaign ads that insult the intelligence of the electorate, and empty promises broken within minutes of Election Day, there is a growing sense that this system is hopelessly rigged and corrupt and cannot be reformed.

The DSA document states near the end: “Nearly fifty thousand people have joined the Democratic Socialists of America since Trump’s 2016 election. Inspired by Bernie Sanders’s message of a moral economy and his call for a political revolution, a new generation is eager to take up the cause of democratic socialism.”

The growth in DSA membership certainly is a barometer of a significant change in the political situation. Millions of workers and young people are looking for a political alternative. The Sanders campaign did not radicalize this layer of workers and youth but served to uncover the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment. These workers were radicalized by decades of deepening economic inequality, ceaseless war and attacks on democratic rights, i.e., the policies of the Democratic Party no less than the Republicans.

What workers need is a socialist economy established by means of a socialist revolution, in which the workers themselves control production. The Democratic Socialists of America are absolutely and irreconcilably hostile to such a perspective.

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