

The phony war between Pelosi and Ocasio-Cortez

By Patrick Martin
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A war of words has broken out between House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the most prominent “left” among congressional Democrats, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The public conflict was touched off by an interview given by Pelosi to Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times*, reported in Dowd’s column last weekend. Pelosi dismissed opposition by four House Democrats—Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib—to legislation to provide \$4.6 billion in funding for Trump’s anti-immigrant operations along the US-Mexico border.

Sneering at the social media following of the four—Ocasio-Cortez alone has 4.7 million followers on Twitter—Pelosi said, “All these people have their public whatever and their Twitter world ... But they didn’t have any following. They’re four people and that’s how many votes they got.”

After Pelosi’s remarks were published by Dowd, there were responses from Ocasio-Cortez and the other three freshmen Democrats, as well as from their aides and political supporters, much of that on Twitter.

Ocasio-Cortez tweeted, “That public ‘whatever’ is called public sentiment ... And wielding the power to shift it is how we actually achieve meaningful change in this country.” Omar tweeted that the Democratic leadership were “just salty about WHO is wielding the power to shift ‘public sentiment’ these days, sis. Sorry not sorry.” Speaking on the ABC program “This Week” on Sunday, Rashida Tlaib said, “It is very disappointing that the speaker would ever try to diminish our voices in so many ways.”

The corporate media leaped in, depicting the conflict as a titanic struggle between Pelosi, representing the party establishment, and a new generation of progressive Democrats led by the four female representatives, given the title “the squad” by the *New York Times*.

This culminated in a major article Wednesday in the *Times*, headlined, “Tensions Between Pelosi and Progressive Democrats of ‘the Squad’ Burst into Flame.” The article presented the House Democratic caucus as a “tinder box”

poised for an explosive rebellion against Pelosi’s leadership.

The *Times* wrote: “The squabble is all the more notable because it pits Ms. Pelosi, the liberal San Francisco congresswoman who is the most powerful elected woman in American history, against a group of progressive Democratic women of color who have broken barriers of their own as part of the most diverse class ever to serve in the House.”

Everything about this supposed conflict is a political fraud. Ocasio-Cortez is not leading a rank-and-file revolt, nor is Pelosi seeking to crush such a rebellion. No such rebellion exists, only a cynical division of labor. Pelosi pushes through the policies demanded by big business and the military-intelligence apparatus, and Ocasio-Cortez and a handful of others seek to give the Democratic Party a “left” face so that it can better disguise its right-wing policies in the 2020 election campaign.

Ocasio-Cortez effectively acknowledged this political reality in comments Tuesday. “I was elected here to do a job,” she told the *Times*. “But I also respect the fact that she [referring to Pelosi] has to do hers.”

Any serious examination of the circumstances surrounding the passage of the border funding bill starts with the fact that the four congresswomen actually voted in favor of a resolution to bring the House version of the funding bill to the floor, which passed on a straight party-line vote, before they voted against the bill itself.

A remarkably blunt article in *Politico*, published June 27, before the eruption of the alleged conflict between Ocasio-Cortez and Pelosi, gives an unvarnished account of the real role of Ocasio-Cortez and her fellow “radicals” among House Democrats. The headline reads: “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez learns to play the insider’s game,” and continues, “The freshman firebrand isn’t tormenting party leaders—she’s working with them.”

While Ocasio-Cortez voted against the bill, “she declined to mobilize her army of social media followers against it or rile up the progressive base in a bid to tank it... Ocasio-Cortez held no impromptu news conference on the

Capitol lawn. She refrained from a tweetstorm. In fact, she didn't write a single post about one of the biggest immigration debates so far under the Democratic majority."

"We didn't necessarily have the votes to stop the House version, but I think that's why it's important for us to record our objections to it," she told *Politico*. "I think we were actually very successful."

"We weren't actively trying to whip a hard line against it, because we were in an extremely difficult situation," Ocasio-Cortez continued.

While members of "the squad" were engaged in impotent handwringing and fell silent on the shameless capitulation of the congressional Democrats to Trump's war on immigrants and refugees, one faction of the Democrats was actually engaged in hardball politics—of an entirely right-wing character.

With a tiny fraction of the publicity accorded Ocasio-Cortez & Co., the pace in the Democratic caucus is being set by the most right-wing faction, comprised of members of the Blue Dogs, a bipartisan caucus called Problem Solvers, and the influx of new members with military-intelligence backgrounds, whom the WSWS has identified as the "CIA Democrats."

The Democrats hold a 235-197 majority in the House of Representatives, after Republican Justin Amash became an independent. That means that Speaker Pelosi can afford the loss of only 18 Democrats on any party-line vote. The four votes of Ocasio-Cortez, Pressley, Omar and Tlaib are not of any great concern, as Pelosi's comments to Maureen Dowd indicate.

But there are some three dozen representatives in the various right-wing Democratic factions who have repeatedly shown their willingness to bloc with the Republicans on key issues, beginning with a series of procedural resolutions in the spring, where they demonstrated their numbers.

The Problem Solvers caucus, which currently numbers 31 Democrats and 15 Republicans, played a decisive role in the passage of the bill to provide the \$4.6 billion in additional funding for Trump's system of detention camps for immigrants.

The group met on Wednesday, June 27, the day after the House passed the Democratic version of the funding bill, and two days after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said that either the House could adopt the Senate version or there would be no bill. They voted to issue a press release calling for the House to accept the Senate bill.

As the *New York Times* explained, "The move pushed Ms. Pelosi to abandon her plan to pass the more restrictive bill, which had higher standards for facilities holding migrant children. Instead she brought up a Senate version that had bipartisan support and swiftly cleared it to become law."

Among those spearheading this capitulation to the Trump administration were the two former CIA agents newly enrolled in the Democratic caucus—Abigail Spanberger of Virginia and Elissa Slotkin of Michigan—as well as the other new representatives with military-intelligence backgrounds: Jason Crow of Colorado, Jared Golden of Maine, Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania, Andy Kim of New Jersey, Conor Lamb of Pennsylvania, Elaine Luria of Virginia, Tom Malinowski of New Jersey, Max Rose of New York, and Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey. All eleven voted for final passage of the Senate version of the immigration funding bill.

Last September, before the election in which these eleven national-security operatives were elevated to positions in the House of Representatives, the WSWS warned:

The rise of the military-intelligence candidates in the Democratic Party shows the false and cynical character of the claims by "left" politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of the Democratic Socialists of America that the Democratic Party can be reformed and turned into an instrument for social justice and peace.

The handful of "lefts" like Ocasio-Cortez will be dwarfed by the dozens of military-intelligence Democrats in the new Congress, to say nothing of the millionaires and political hacks who constitute the bulk of the Democratic caucus.

This basic truth cannot be obscured by all the sound and fury of the supposed "war" between Nancy Pelosi and Ocasio-Cortez. The Democratic Party is a party controlled by the American ruling class and its military-intelligence apparatus. It cannot be reformed or in any way serve as the vehicle for the defense of the class interests and democratic rights of working people.

To contact the WSWS and the
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