

Bowing to House Democratic leadership, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez purges staff

By Genevieve Leigh
7 August 2019

Last week Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Democratic Party congresswoman from New York and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, removed two leading members of her staff in Washington D.C., her chief of staff, Saikat Chakrabarti, and her communications director, Corbin Trent.

The purging of these two members of her staff is a significant political move, as both Chakrabarti and Trent were instrumental in the election of Ocasio-Cortez and largely responsible for manufacturing her political persona.

Their removal came after a series of public disputes on Twitter between Chakrabarti and leading House Democrats. In one early tweet that has since been deleted, Chakrabarti criticized Democrats who voted against a version of a bill to fund Trump's border wall supported by Ocasio-Cortez, calling them "the new Southern Democrats," referring to a prominent section of the Democratic Party who fought to defend Jim Crow segregation. He also accused Native American Congresswomen Sharice Davids of voting "to enable a racist system."

The official House Democratic Caucus Twitter account responded to Chakrabarti: "Who is this guy and why is he explicitly singling out a Native American woman of color?" This was followed by a series of back and forth denunciations of the various characters involved, all devoid of any meaningful political content. In early July, Chakrabarti tweeted another string of criticisms focused on House Speaker Pelosi around the same issues.

The exchanges took place in the context of a political conflict involving House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and four House Democrats—Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib—over the legislation to fund Trump's anti-immigrant operations

along the US-Mexico border.

The conflict was picked up and promoted by all the major news stations and mainstream media outlets, above all, the *New York Times*, which ran a feature article in the midst of the events titled "Tensions Between Pelosi and Progressive Democrats of 'the Squad' Burst into Flame." The four freshman congresswomen were portrayed as leading a rank-and-file revolt against the Democratic Party establishment.

However, the four congresswomen played a critical role in ensuring passage of the border bill that was at the center of the conflict, voting in favor of a resolution to bring the House version of the funding bill to the floor before voting against the bill itself.

Ocasio-Cortez later joined Democrats in voting in favor of a two-year budget resolution that includes a record \$738 billion for the US military.

There is a clear division of labor within the Democratic Party. Ocasio-Cortez and a small number of her colleagues are permitted to posture as opponents of carefully selected policies in order to give the party a "left" gloss, while the party pushes through the policies demanded by big business and the military-intelligence apparatus.

Ocasio-Cortez quite bluntly admitted in an article in *Politico* that she and her colleagues "weren't actively trying to whip a hard line against [the border funding bill], because we were in an extremely difficult situation." The "difficult situation" to which she was referring was that of calibrating the public "opposition" in a manner which would prevent the eruption of mass protests against Trump's border policy while ensuring that the right-wing agenda of the Democratic Party goes ahead.

The conflict ended with the passage of funding bill

and a closed-door meeting between Pelosi and Ocasio-Cortez, after which Pelosi said the two “did not have many differences.” News of the departure of Trent and Chakrabarti broke a week later.

No one involved in these theatrics has anything to do with progressive, let alone radical, politics, including Chakrabarti and Trent.

Chakrabarti has reportedly taken a job at New Consensus, a newly created “think tank” ostensibly dedicated to advancing the Green New Deal. The think tank is made up of professional Democratic Party operatives, including Demund Drummer, a former organizer for the Obama campaign; Rihanna Gun-Wright, the policy director for Abdul El-Sayed’s 2018 campaign and former policy intern for Michelle Obama; and Zack Exley, a major figure in MoveOn.org.

Chakrabarti is thoroughly enmeshed in Democratic Party politics. He began his career out of Harvard with a brief stint at a hedge fund, before leaving to make millions in Silicon Valley where he co-founded Mockingbird, a web design tool. He went on to work for the payment processor Stripe before joining the Sanders campaign in 2015. After Sanders’ defeat, he and his colleagues founded Brand New Congress and Justice Democrats.

However, Ocasio-Cortez’s move to remove the two further exposes her subservience to Democratic Party leadership. Far from leading “a radical insurgency” to reform the Democrats, Ocasio-Cortez has once again signaled that she is willing and capable to play the role for which she was groomed. She has no problem purging her closest staff members to demonstrate her political fealties.

Moreover, the theatrics surrounding the border funding wall, along with the removal of Chakrabarti and Trent, lays bare the fraud promoted by groups like the Democratic Socialists of America, Justice Democrats, and Brand New Congress that anything progressive can be achieved within the framework of the Democratic Party or by pressuring the Democratic Party to the left.

These groups function primarily to cover over the fundamental class issues and to subordinate the working class to the Democratic Party.

To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>