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The specter of socialism haunts US Congress

A specter is haunting Congress: the specter of socialism.

Last week, as the US Congress discussed approving billions more dollars in weapons for the war against Russia and began negotiating cuts to social programs in advance of the debt ceiling expiration, the House spent three days discussing and adopting a resolution denouncing socialism and pledging to reverse all the social gains made by the working class on a global scale in the century since the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The media presents the passage of the resolution as nothing more than a propaganda ploy by the far-right Republicans, but it is much more than that. By dedicating a substantial portion of its legislative agenda to a condemnation of socialism, the US Congress expresses the fear within the ruling class that a powerful socialist movement will take root in the working class and orient the emerging wave of strikes and social struggles in a revolutionary direction.

The three-page resolution, titled “Denouncing the Horrors of Socialism,” recites a century of lies about socialism promulgated by fascist White Russian émigrés, Hitler and the John Birch society.



Incoming House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California receives the gavel from House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York on the House floor at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, early Saturday, January 7, 2023. [AP Photo/Andrew Harnik]

The vote was overwhelming, with 328 voting in support and 86 against. Republicans voted 219-0 in favor of the resolution and were joined by a majority of Democrats, 109 of whom voted in favor with 86 against.

The resolution begins: “Socialist ideology necessitates a concentration of power that has time and time again collapsed into Communist regimes, totalitarian rule, and brutal dictatorships.”

It absurdly states that “tens of millions died in the Bolshevik Revolution,” omitting the fact that the Russian Revolution ended the imperialist carnage of the First World War and that it was the 14 capitalist powers that invaded Russia to reverse the revolution that triggered a long and bloody civil war.

The resolution says socialism is responsible for “the killing of over 100,000,000 people worldwide,” a made-up figure that tellingly includes the German casualties from the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

The reality is that it is the capitalist system which is responsible for deaths and social suffering on a mass scale. The 20th century alone saw two imperialist world wars resulting in the deaths of 20 and 60 million people each, and a Holocaust in which 10 million were exterminated. The imperialist wars in Korea, Vietnam, Algeria, Angola, Iraq, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and elsewhere left millions more dead.

The capitalist system is responsible for the deaths of 20 million people due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while hundreds of millions face the real threat of starvation every day. On top of this, billions of lives are at risk due to the US-led escalation of the war against nuclear-armed Russia.

In a defensive acknowledgement of growing popular interest in socialism, the resolution attempts to taint socialism by association with the Stalinist Great Terror of 1936-39 and the Stalinist police states of North Korea and Cambodia, as well as with bourgeois nationalist targets of US imperialism like Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

The resolution concludes by unmistakably associating even the most modest social reforms with socialism: “Whereas the United States of America was founded on the belief in the sanctity of the individual, to which the collectivistic system of socialism in all of its forms is fundamentally and necessary opposed: Now, therefore be it resolved... That Congress denounces socialism in all its forms and opposes the implementation of socialist policies in the United States of America.”

This is a political declaration of war on the working class and the social programs won through a century of social struggle.

Before the resolution was brought to a vote Thursday, the House Rules Committee rejected a proposed amendment introduced by Democrats that would have clarified “that opposition to the implementation of socialist policies in the US does not include federal programs like Medicare and Social Security,” according to the *Hill*.

This did not stop the Democrats from joining with their far-right Republican “colleagues” and voting in favor of the resolution. In doing so, the Democrats have agreed to the underlying premise of the upcoming Republican campaign to cut social programs in the name of reducing “debt,” as they have done repeatedly for 50 years.

It comes as no surprise that leading Democrats played an active role in forcing the measure through, including House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, both of whom have previously stated that they would never make any concessions to the Democratic Socialists of America, which constitutes a faction of the Democratic Party and currently has five members in Congress.

The passage of the resolution explodes the claim by the DSA that the Democratic Party can be made into an instrument for social reform. This resolution, supported by the entire Democratic leadership in the House and a majority of the House Democratic caucus, is a pledge by the party to oppose any policy that distributes wealth in a downward direction or infringes in any way on the wealth of the rich.

The DSA has spent the first weeks of the 118th Congress endorsing and legitimizing the Democratic leaders who passed the resolution against socialism.

Last month, the DSA’s entire congressional slate voted 15 times to support Hakeem Jeffries in the House election for the speakership. DSA Congressperson Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez explained she supported Jeffries and that she intended her vote to show “the Democrats are unified.” This was presented as necessary to confront the Republicans, but the result is that the Democrats and Republicans have unified against socialism.

Some DSA-endorsed politicians even voted for the resolution, including Ro Khanna, a national co-chair of Bernie Sanders’ 2020 presidential campaign. The DSA described Khanna in a recent voting guide as “a reliable ally in the global fight against fascism,” and an opponent of “corporate money,” concluding, “We recommend that voters re-elect him.” The entire Democratic delegation of the state of Nevada, where DSA members currently lead the state party, voted for the resolution as well.

As the Democratic Party leadership orchestrated the passage of the resolution against socialism, it also promoted DSA members of Congress to high-profile leadership positions.

On Monday, Ocasio-Cortez announced she was “thrilled” and “excited” to have been selected by the Democratic leadership to the number two position on the House Oversight Committee. Jeffries himself said Thursday that he was appointing DSA-endorsed Ilhan Omar to a leadership position on the House Budget Committee after Republicans conducted a witch-hunt to remove her from the Foreign Affairs Committee.

There is nothing inconsistent about the political establishment’s decision to simultaneously elevate the profile of the DSA while also denouncing socialism. The threat of socialism does not come from the pro-capitalist DSA and its affluent middle-class constituency. On the contrary, the ruling class relies on the critical services rendered by the DSA to trap social opposition and lend its right-wing policies a false “left” veneer.

What the ruling class does fear is that the emerging movement of the working class, expressed in a series of powerful strikes in the US and the growth of strikes and social protests on a world scale, will break through the domination of the trade union bureaucracies, acquire a self-conscious, socialist character, and upend the plans to escalate the war against Russia and pay for the war by slashing living conditions.

This will not happen automatically. It requires the conscious intervention of the world socialist movement, represented today only by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world.

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