



Opening Statement

BSA Meets Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

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BLACK SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

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Thank you for taking time to speak with us today, Alexandria.

We want to begin by first saying “congratulations” for your recent successes within the realm of electoral politics, and for amplifying the word and concept of “Socialism” in your work. A significant part of this dialogue is going to, hopefully, be all of us sitting here now reflecting on whether or not your stances and/or policies ultimately reflect or aid an internationalist, socialist mission, but we would like to say that your policies as they stand now are without a doubt exceptional, and if they were to be implemented today, they’d bring about a monumental socioeconomic boost to this country. You should be extremely proud of what you’ve done with the challenges you’ve faced thus far, although we know you know this is only the beginning of a lifelong struggle. We’re here to work with you if you’re open to it, but this of course means you, just as us over at BSA, being open to learning and growing, even in being sociopolitically active. That’s why we’d like to ask that we all leave egos and posturing at the door, and have an honest conversation about what’s best for poor and working class people, and ultimately, the human species as a whole. None of us within this room know everything, and we’re all just doing the best that we can, sacrificing with a greater trust in the capabilities of all humanity.



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The start of this statement might feel a bit rough, challenging, and perhaps excessively critical, especially given the world that you're enshrouded in right now, and the recent gains you've made. But we wouldn't be sitting here with you right now if we didn't believe deep down that you have made a genuine commitment to serve and better humanity in whatever way that you possibly can or know how.

Our ultimate focus as an organization is not just the betterment of humanity, however, but ultimately the sustainment and survival of the human species as a whole, which means liberation from wage slavery and all other forms of economic and social oppression, and that is why we feel there is room for dialogue here, despite any potential misunderstandings that we may have at the moment, and despite any potential differences in strategy.

While we feel most politicians are pretty corruptible, we have a gut feeling that your intentions might be in the right place, and that you are someone who is willing to sacrifice for what is right. We don't believe that your intention is to allow exploitation to continue, but something we want to make sure that we're on the same page about is that word and concept of "exploitation" and how far exactly that extends.



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We want to begin with a somewhat, but not-really-provocative statement:

Most Leftists we talk to and are active with – particularly Black American ones – don't like or trust politicians (ourselves included).

Even as we sit here with you now, there is an internal stir of hesitancy amongst us, simply because we know a significant portion of the Left who are of our strategic resolve might perceive this as a waste of time.

You're personally my (Z's) potential representative, so I am at peace with this exchange just off of that alone, but even further, we see this as an educational opportunity, and of course an opportunity to spotlight the greater mission of our organization, and how this relates to what you and other self-identifying Socialist politicians are currently doing.



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While your platform and policy proposals are absolutely exceptional, we're not confident that you have a full, cohesive understanding of what Socialism is or entails, how we are to achieve it, or the base elements of what it would look like in real life.

This is not only because of the definitions you provide when asked about Socialism, or your responses to inquiries in the mainstream media with regard to Socialism, but because of the limits and language of your platform.

We have just one crucial example that we took from your website:

“The Citizens United ruling is centered around the notion that money is speech and that corporations are people. This idea is far from any reasonable interpretation of the Constitution, and is deeply harmful to the institutions of social democracy.”

The key term and/or concept for us there within that quote is “Social Democracy,” but before we get to this, let us preface by stating that we are fully aware that politics isn't as straightforward as most people think it is.



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I (Z) am someone who has worked in public relations and entertainment/media, and Sean is someone who is heavily involved in legal work, so communication is something that we understand on a few different levels. Whether you realize it or not, a part of the job of the politicians and their strategists is to finesse the people as a whole, and if you're one of the exceptional few who have poor and working class people's interests in mind, then you're doing this while at the same time trying to listen to their demands and serve their best interests.

After your primary win, here is something we stated over social media – we've made a few edits here to make the concepts more accessible, for the record:

“Think of most politicians as people to be pushed or pulled.

The question is always ‘who/what is doing the pushing and the pulling?’

As of now, private corporations push and pull almost 100% of the politicians in America.

Only a handful are pushed and pulled by poor and working class people today.



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Politicians cannot and will not ‘hand over’ democratic control of the means of production through the public sector, or on their own accord.

The poor and working classes can and must DEMAND democratic control of the means of production and begin building an alternative socioeconomic system from the ground up.

We’ve had ‘Socialist’ representation at the local, state, and federal levels within American politics before.

That alone will never do it.

We believe poor and working class people must realize what is truly theirs and not only demand it collectively, but pool together resources to begin building the alternative.

Politicians play an offensive or defensive role, so the more Socialist representation the better, but we need to begin having a more united and localized focus that establishes a socioeconomic foundation from which poor and working class people can democratically control ALL sectors of the economy.”





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Our thing is, no one person, or even a collective of politicians, can be the “revolution” themselves.

However, what you can do as a politician, besides voting on and introducing important legislation, is educate and bring attention to what real Socialism is:

Workers democratically controlling the means of production, and democratically controlling the surplus value (or profits) that their hard work produces.

Here in the US, we can make ground on this, and we at BSA feel this is something you can speak to in a way that isn't dishonest or misleading. However, when you imply that the ideal state is Social Democracy, as you do on your website and in your interviews, or as your public “definition” of Socialism implies, it doesn't make us feel confident that Democratic Socialism is something that you actually advocate for.

We don't know if you're advocating for Social Democratic policy as a gateway to full worker control of the economy, or whether you're advocating for Social Democracy as an end.





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We like to think of Democratic Socialism as “democracy in the workplace,” and this looks like cooperatives... *but not cooperatives alone*. Democratic Socialism looks like Worker Self-Directed Enterprises (WSDEs) that are heavily subsidized by a highly decentralized government, and connected under confederations that are committed to an international struggle for all of the virtues so many people in America claim to believe in: *democracy, liberty, equal opportunity, and above all else, freedom (in every way, shape, and form)*.

We need political figures who can speak on their ideas of Socialism in terms of how we ultimately reach a socialist society. Bernie Sanders, who is widely credited (along with figures like you) for bringing the word and concept of “Socialism” back to mainstream dialogue within America, actually has a platform and policies that are more Social Democratic than Democratic Socialist. But even with that said, he has made a clear commitment to support worker-owned businesses or cooperatives. Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party in the UK has gone even further, and advocates for carving out a cooperative sector of the entire economy. Positions like these, if acted upon, can give poor and working class people in the common sector a wider window to begin challenging capitalist relations themselves, and at the local (grassroots) level.



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“Reform vs. Revolution” can be a false dichotomy within the context of real Leftist conversation sometimes.

We like the concept of “non-reformist reforms” that Kali Akuno of Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi explains in one *Jackson Rising* excerpt, and we’d like to share it with you.

Kali states the following:

“None of the system(s) change processes we aim to make can or will be sustained in a non-revolutionary context without structural support and reinforcement from the state.

The structural support and reinforcement in question entails legal justification, incentives, resource allocation ... monitoring and enforcement from operatives of the state and civil society, meaning civilian institutions that monitor the conduct and performance of government.

These transformative policy components are fundamentally articulations of ‘non-reformist reforms’.

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The notion of non-reformist reforms, although conceptually far older than its articulation, was first concretely formulated by Andre Gorz, a French Socialist...

[Gorz] posed the formulation as a means to bridge our short-term engagements for social justice in everyday life to our longer-term vision for an anti-capitalist world.

The formulation centers on waging struggle for demands and reforms that improve conditions in people's immediate lives, but which don't strengthen the capitalist system, but instead subvert its logic, upend its social relations, and dilute its strength.

These reforms seek to create new logics, new relations, and new imperatives that create a new equilibrium and balance of forces to weaken capitalism and enable the development of an anti-capitalist alternative.”





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As a politician who claims to be a Democratic Socialist, we expect you to advocate for non-reformist reforms, or reforms that not just help us survive in the short-term, but allow (and incentivize) poor and working class people to begin building an alternative, democratic, decentralized socioeconomic system for the long-term. This also means fighting against “reforms” that put poor and working class people in potential danger, or that have the potential to ultimately keep us locked into the capitalist system forever.

We know the role of any arm of a successful socialist movement is not to force-feed people hard Leftist cliches or rhetoric, but you and others working within government can serve as potential bridges to real, tangible Socialism, both in terms of helping to make it acceptable to talk openly about Socialism in America again, and serving as an entry point to serious socialist strategy outside of just legislative policy proposals.

Some, including Bernie Sanders, have stated in the past that we need to see some acceptance of Social Democratic policy here in America before we expect full worker control of the economy, but that full worker control of the economy should be the end goal. Marx described the potential movement from a capitalist society into a socialist society almost as an *evolution*, and so this rationale makes sense, but there is more to this conversation than meets the eye, especially taking into consideration both intensifying domestic and foreign conflicts, and the greater existential threat of climate change. *Time is of the essence.*



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Our stipulation is that we **cannot** and **should not** be advocating for a Social Democratic socioeconomic system as an end, for Social Democracy does not disable capitalist relations.

It is still Capitalism.

If we do not make this stipulation, then we risk remaining trapped by the capitalist system, or hitting some of the limits that working class people have hit within Nordic countries, which sustain a more equitable distribution of excess wealth, but through a global economic system of inequality.

Some of us remember how it used to be. The extent to which we were willing to fight back against “the system” was to vote and volunteer for, or donate to, organizations like Represent.Us, Mayday PAC, Wolf PAC, Justice Democrats, Our Revolution, and others.

We signed petitions. We marched. And more.

It wasn't until we looked a bit further back into history here in the United States, and in a bit more detail than usual, that we realized we've been here many times before. Socialists have been trying to work through government to bring about substantial change for well over a century, and there are many lessons we can learn by studying the dynamics of this historical reality.



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America's first Black Socialist, Peter H. Clark, pushed for a strict electoral politics strategy virtually his *entire* career before stating in a personal letter to Frederick Douglass in 1889 that Black Americans needed "industrial, pecuniary independence as much as or more than they need political independence." We've had socialist movements and representation in government here in America before. The mistake that socialist coalitions made in the past, however, was thinking that top-down, primarily legislative measures that preserved capitalist relations would be enough to make things right. Decades since the passing of the New Deal, we've learned the limits of this direction, and now know that we must dig deeper, building democratic institutions in the common sector amongst the poor and working class people first.

From the bottom up.

Right now, the Left (*not Liberals, but the hard Left*) is being stalled from the inside by academic elitism, big egos, and sectarian infighting, amongst many other things. This is merely a reflection of the greater capitalist system we've all been conditioned by that pits us against each other under hierarchical structures of power and control. Leftists aren't exempt from this conditioning, and until we can address it and learn to fight it as a collective, we are not going to find true liberation. We want to publicize our meeting with you here for many different reasons, but with this is going to come heat from some who will posit that we're not really Leftists because we've met with someone whose policies reflect "Social Democracy" more than outright, explicit Socialism.



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What we want to communicate with our base and platform is that we met with you here today to first and foremost tell you about our strategy and to communicate to you what Socialism is, and not only how we feel your explanations of Socialism have been lacking, but how you can explain Socialism to people in a way that is easy to grapple with and understand, granted you are actually a Socialist, as opposed to a Social Democrat.

Are you willing to communicate to the masses what a pathway to real Democratic Socialism looks like in an honest and liberatory way, and with your platform present policies that aid in the building of this pathway?

If so, we're here to help, and can link you with countless others all across the world with decades more knowledge and experience than us, and who see in you and others like us the potential for something truly revolutionary.

Thank you again for your time.

Solidarity,

Z and Sean of Black Socialists of America





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OF AMERICA**

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