

“Chicago Socialist Campaign” seeks to head off opposition to Democrats

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11 October 2014

Three groups in the middle-class pseudo-left, the International Socialist Organization (ISO), Solidarity, and Socialist Alternative, have formed a “Chicago Socialist Campaign” to back a joint candidate for alderman (city council) in the city’s 25th ward.

Located on the near South Side, the 25th ward is dominated by the largely Hispanic working class neighborhood of Pilsen, where 35 percent of households have an income below \$25,000. The current alderman, Danny Solis, is part of the Democratic Party machine headed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

The three groups have joined forces in an effort to replicate the electoral success of Socialist Alternative’s Kshama Sawant, who won a seat on the Seattle City Council last year. They have chosen a long-time figure on the supposed “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party, Jorge Mújica, a self-described “immigrant rights activist” and “labor leader.”

Although the ISO and its allies are billing Mújica as an “independent socialist,” he is neither. This is underscored by the fact that Mújica ran in the 2010 Democratic primary to seek the nomination for US Representative in the Third Congressional District of Illinois.

None of Mújica’s demands are actually “socialist.” Nowhere in his program does he propose the working class conduct a struggle to break the grip of the financial aristocracy, which has enriched itself through decades of deindustrialization and relentless attacks on the working class. Nor does his program call for workers to carry out a political break with Obama, Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Democratic Party and build a mass political movement to fight for socialism.

On the contrary, the words: “capitalism,” “Obama,” “Rahm Emanuel,” “Democratic Party,” “war” and “social inequality” never appear in his program. Instead, there are rather amorphous demands, ranging from calls to “end corporate welfare” and adopt “legislation that would

force banks to renegotiate the principal due on homes that have lost their value,” which, at times, are part of the populist rhetoric of sections of the Democratic Party.

Like the Sawant campaign, Mújica’s main proposal is to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Taken at face value, even if this measure were enacted it would still leave hundreds of thousands of Chicago workers earning poverty level wages. According to a study last year by the Economic Policy Institute, the amount necessary for a family of four in Chicago to secure a modest standard of living was \$73,055 in 2012. At \$15 an hour, a worker laboring 40 hours a week for 52 weeks would still earn only \$31,200.

Any wage hike in Chicago, moreover, would be subject to the same extensive loopholes and strung-out implementation as the corporate-friendly bill finally passed by Sawant and the Democrats on Seattle’s City Council. Many of the “living wage” initiatives backed by the unions contain explicit waivers to pay the new wage for employers who sign neutrality agreements or sweetheart contracts with the SEIU and other unions.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously pointed out, the campaign for this demand is aimed at maintaining the political grip of the Democratic Party over the working class. The “Fight for 15” and “15 Now” campaigns have been coordinated by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and their pseudo-left allies to bolster illusions in the Obama administration and improve the mid-term election prospects of the Democratic Party.

Mayor Emanuel, a vicious enemy of the working class, is the latest to jump on this bandwagon, signing an executive order last month establishing a \$13 minimum wage for employees of city of Chicago contractors, about 1,000 workers.

None of Mújica’s proposals impinge upon the wealth and political power of the corporate and financial elite.

Instead, his politics reflect the concerns and interests of more affluent sections of the middle class—union executives, Hispanic and other minority business owners, etc., who want more say-so over the distribution of public resources.

Mújica made this clear in an interview with the ISO's *Socialist Worker* last June when he said, "It's within the alderman's power to decide whether the budget benefits the corporations or the people who live in the ward ... For example, in city administration, we have what are called capital investments ... These are long-term investments in the infrastructure of a ward for the benefit of ... who?"

"The alderman, if he or she has the backing of the community, has the power to decide that, instead of bringing in another multinational corporation's franchise, we could open another taquería de Panchito y Josefa, which was displaced because it didn't have the financial ability to keep its place."

One of his demands, for "increasing educational requirements for all city police officers," deliberately conceals the character of the capitalist state as a body of armed men charged with defending the wealth and power of the ruling minority against the exploited majority, and encourages illusions in reforming one of the most notoriously brutal police departments in the country.

Finally, for all his talk about representing the interests of immigrants, nowhere on his election site does Mújica dare to mention *who* has been responsible for the record number of deportations over the last six and a half years: namely, the Obama administration.

Summing up his campaign, Mújica told the *Socialist Worker*, "If someone wants to use this campaign for their own ends, and their goal is to move the Democratic Party to the left, then that's fine. If they turn this to their advantage, it will be to ours as well. It's a fact that the right wing—even the far right—dominates official politics in this country. So anything we can do to move the political debate to the left will be a great advance."

Long bitter experience has shown that the Democratic Party, a capitalist party of imperialist war, mass domestic spying and savage attacks on the working class, cannot be persuaded to change its stripes. The Democrats long ago abandoned the program of liberal social reforms—however limited and inadequate—with which they were once identified. Like the Republicans, they have for the last four decades steadily sought to impose the crisis of American capitalism on the backs of the working class in the US while unleashing militarism around the world.

The promotion of illusions in the Democratic Party,

however, is not the result of political naïveté when it comes to the ISO, Socialist Alternative, Mújica & Co. The move to the right by the Democratic Party has coincided with the integration of an entire layer of former middle class radicals into the political establishment. In the US and around the world the anti-war protesters of yesteryear are now the proponents of "human rights" imperialism whose more privileged lifestyles depend on a rising stock market and savage attacks on the social rights of the working class.

The discrediting of Obama and the Democratic Party, particularly in the eyes of young people and workers hit hardest by the economic crisis and the administration's austerity measures, has produced a shift to the left in the population and a growing receptivity for socialist and revolutionary politics.

The Chicago Socialist Campaign is part of a series of political maneuvers to create a new trap for the working class and fill the "space opening up in mainstream politics to the left of the Democratic Party," as one publication approvingly cited by the ISO noted.

In Oakland, the ISO is backing the campaign of Dan Siegel, former legal adviser to Democratic Mayor Jean Quan, while in New York, ISO member Brian Jones is running as a Green Party candidate for lieutenant governor on a ticket headed by longtime Green Party leader Howie Hawkins.

Similarly in Chicago, the ISO hopes to support Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis—who sold out the 2012 teachers strike—as a mayoral candidate against Rahm Emanuel. Lewis' supposed "independence" has already been demonstrated by her gushing support for the reelection of Democratic Governor Pat Quinn, who has attacked public worker pensions and the rights and conditions of teachers in Chicago and other cities.

As social conditions in the US and around the world grow increasingly explosive, and the working class and youth become alienated from the traditional parties, these fake left organizations are attempting to fill the political vacuum and secure the interests of the privileged social layers they represent. Most of all, they fear the emergence of a political movement of the working class that is genuinely independent of the ruling class.



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