The six-day rise and fall of “democratic socialist” Ramirez-Rosa for Illinois lieutenant governor

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Democratic Party primary campaigns are currently underway for the November 2018 Illinois gubernatorial elections. The candidates are preparing for elections to be held next March that will select the opponent of Republican Bruce Rauner, the right-wing billionaire current governor who has declared his intention to seek another term in office.

The leading Democratic Party candidate is Jay Pritzker (net worth $3.4 billion), heir to the Hyatt fortune, tech industry investor and political operative. The various brothers and sisters, fathers and children in the Pritzker family include among them about half of Illinois’ resident billionaires. They are all close to the Democratic Party. Jay Pritzker chaired Hillary Clinton’s 2008 presidential primary campaign. His sister, Penny (net worth $2.6 billion), served as commerce secretary under Obama.

Next in line for the nomination is multi-millionaire Chris Kennedy, of the Kennedy political family. Kennedy, lately the chairman of the board of trustees for the scandal-ridden University of Illinois system, has so far focused his campaign on promising a return to “law and order” by combating corruption and gang violence.

As these various billionaires and millionaires prepared to battle each other over who will escalate the attack on the working class, a revealing episode occurred several weeks ago in relation to one of the candidates currently considered to be a long-shot for the Democratic nomination, Daniel Biss, the Illinois state senator representing the affluent North Shore region.

Biss, a thoroughly establishment Democratic politician, announced on August 31 that he had selected a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, Chicago alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, to be his running mate as lieutenant governor.

Biss entered the Illinois governor’s race by promoting a proposal to reduce taxes on low- and middle-income earners and increase taxes on the rich, and by declaring his support for the “Medicare for All” proposal associated with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

These proposals were thoroughly cynical, as Biss, along with the Democratic Party as a whole, is complicit in and supports an escalation of the attack on health care and other social programs. Biss previously supported $1.6 billion in cuts to Medicaid, slashing public pensions, expanding charter school funding, and providing subsidies to energy giant Exelon.

In a campaign dominated by Pritzker and Kennedy, however, Biss figured he could fill a political vacuum by posturing as “left.” The selection of Ramirez-Rosa was made with similar calculations in mind, and the “democratic socialist” was eager to oblige. “There’s something much more powerful than money and political machines,” Ramirez-Rosa declared when the announcement was made, “and that’s organized people.”

Ramirez-Rosa told *Hard Lens*, a local internet news program, “If we come together as a movement of working people, we’re gonna transform this state for the betterment of everyone and Daniel Biss is the governor to deliver that.” The various pseudo-left organizations cheered. Socialism was on the march, in the form of a gubernatorial campaign headed by a long-time Democratic Party operative!

As it turned out, the political marriage was short-

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lived. Six days after the initial announcement, Biss dumped Ramirez-Rosa after a powerful backer, Democratic US Representative for Illinois Bradley Schneider, pulled his support for the campaign in a public Facebook post, citing Ramirez-Rosa's critical attitude towards Israel.

Evidently, among the list of things "more powerful than money and political machines" did not number the candidacy of Ramirez-Rosa. This is not because Ramirez-Rosa posed any more of a threat to the interests of the ruling class than Biss himself. However, his association with the nationalist Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) movement directed against Israel was considered unacceptable by at least some of the Democratic Party establishment in Illinois.

Attempting to repair his "progressive" image, Biss replaced Rosa within a couple of days with Illinois state representative and former social worker Litesa Wallace, an African-American woman.

The six-day rise and fall of Ramirez-Rosa says more about the politics of the DSA—and the various organizations that, like the DSA, operate within the orbit of the Democratic Party—than anything else. Representing privileged sections of the upper-middle class, their role is to provide political cover for the Democratic Party. The petty-bourgeois operatives that head these groups are like so many munchkin tailors, desperately seeking to prevent the Democratic Party giant's trousers from falling off.

Ramirez-Rosa spoke earlier this month to *Jacobin* magazine, edited by DSA member Bhaskar Sunkara. Attempting to justify his decision to run with Biss, Ramirez-Rosa declared that Biss had assured him that he had made an about-face from his previous positions. "I did not join the ticket until he had publicly said that … he regretted putting forward a piece of legislation that would have slashed public employee retirees' benefits for the benefit of Wall Street."

Revealing the cynical calculations that actually formed the basis of the campaign, Ramirez-Rosa said, "We have a leading candidate on the Democratic side who seems on a path to win the nomination who is a billionaire, JB Pritzker... It was important that in the Democratic primary, we had a ticket that was actually advocating for substantive policies that would address the needs of working people."

Had Biss been elected with Ramirez-Rosa at his side, however, this would not alter the anti-working class character of the policies of the administration. The DSA, however, would have been a direct participant in the operation, with all the perks, financial and otherwise, that would go along with this.

Since his exit from the Biss campaign, Ramirez-Rosa also spoke to *Huffington Post* on the Biss campaign debacle, declaring his allegiance to the Democratic Party and his aspirations for the next election cycle: "My hope is that five years from now, as a Democratic Party, we are more committed to having these constructive dialogues and allowing for these differences [in relation to BDS] to exist."

These developments in Illinois should be seen in the broader political context. There is a deep and growing social discontent among millions of workers and youth in the United States. During the 2016 elections, this found distorted reflection in the support for Sanders, whose political task was to direct opposition back into the Democratic Party and behind its candidate, Hillary Clinton. In this he was assisted by the DSA, the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative and other organizations of the upper-middle class.

The election of Trump has brought to a head a deep-going political crisis in the United States. Whatever their differences with the Trump administration, the Democrats support the assault on the working class and the expansion of militarist violence. They are currently focusing their efforts on whipping up a campaign over "Russian interference" in US politics aimed at creating the basis for the repression and criminalization of dissent.

The DSA sees its role as providing a buttress for this rotting system. The ill-fated Ramirez-Rosa campaign for Illinois lieutenant governor is not the first, and it will not be the last, attempt to derail and block the emergence of a genuine socialist movement of workers and youth.

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