

Socialist Alternative and Democratic Socialists of America hold election rally for Democrats in Chicago

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Socialist Alternative (SA) hosted an election event, “Rally to Put Socialists in City Hall,” at the United Electrical Workers Hall in Chicago Thursday night to build support for three Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) candidates for Chicago City Council: Byron Sigcho Lopez (25th ward), Rossana Rodriguez-Sanchez (33rd ward), and 35th ward alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, currently running for re-election.

The event was aimed at promoting increased collaboration between Socialist Alternative and the DSA, as both deepen their integration into the Democratic Party.

The DSA is a faction of the Democratic Party and is being promoted by sections of the party establishment and the media. Obama recently endorsed DSA member and New York congressional candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Just hours before the rally began, the DSA’s Ramirez-Rosa endorsed Democratic candidate for mayor Toni Preckwinkle, the Cook County board president and machine politician. Last year, Ramirez-Rosa had a short stint as candidate for Illinois lieutenant governor as part of Illinois Democrat Daniel Biss’s campaign (see: “The six-day rise and fall of ‘democratic socialist’ Ramirez-Rosa for Illinois lieutenant governor”).

Ramirez-Rosa endorsed Preckwinkle at the Logan Square “L” station, alongside alderman Will Guzzardi, a protege of Biss. Preckwinkle chairs the Cook County Democratic Party, long known for its corruption and duplicity. A Chicago alderman from 1991 to 2010, she has since been president of the Cook County Board, presiding over budget cuts to the county health and hospital system as well as the public defender’s office

and the Cook County Jail, known internationally for its horrific conditions. She was an important early supporter of Barack Obama.

Somewhat embarrassed by these developments, Socialist Alternative members criticized the DSA for being too willing to endorse all and sundry Democratic officials, such as Preckwinkle. This is done with the aim of trying to maintain a nominal distance from the Democratic Party establishment, even as Socialist Alternative calls for collaboration with and support of Democratic Party candidates and policies.

Chicago Socialist Alternative leading member Teresa Powers chaired the event, proclaiming the organization’s willingness to work with any “progressives,” and outlined a “united front” electoral strategy for rent control and affordable housing initiatives, “taxing the rich,” and a civilian police review board, suggesting support for the Democratic Party’s Civilian Office of Police Accountability (see: “Chicago launches new fig-leaf police oversight agency”)

Emphasizing the threat posed by the far-right, Powers and the three city council candidates called for “left unity” and a new party to fight against fascism. She described SA’s aim in building “a new party independent of the rotten Democratic machine,” but then said, “We don’t have resources to launch all this.”

This was intended to justify collaboration with the Democrats, and in fact any “new party” set up by Socialist Alternative would be aimed at corraling support behind the Democrats, as Socialist Alternative currently does. During the 2016 elections, the organization virtually dissolved itself into the electoral campaign of US Senator Bernie Sanders, who ended up

endorsing Hillary Clinton.

Proposals included a demand for a \$15 minimum wage, “union rights for all” and lifting the ban on rent control in the city, an initiative supported by billionaire Democratic candidate for Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker. That a \$15 minimum wage is wholly inadequate, given that the current city minimum wage stands at \$12 per hour and is set to rise to \$13 in 2019, passed by unmentioned.

Billionaire Jeff Bezos, the world’s wealthiest man, recently announced that he was raising the minimum wage at Amazon to \$15 an hour, even as he moved to end bonuses and other pay schemes that will result in a pay cut for many Amazon workers. This move was praised by Sanders.

The speeches given by the three city council candidates were characteristically devoid of political content and leaned heavily on the personal identity of the speakers and their experiences. Rossana Rodriguez spoke of her experiences in Puerto Rico before moving to Chicago in 2009. Ramirez-Rosa attempted to portray his ejection from the Biss campaign over opposition to Israeli policies as a profile in courage.

A 2015 Democratic Party candidate for alderman, now a DSA member running in the 25th ward, Byron Sigcho struggled to explain his reasons for running as a socialist in this election, other than that it seems to be in fashion. The leader of the Pilsen Alliance and SEIU Local 73 official declared the likelihood of his electoral success: “Last time, I was only 70 votes from a run-off. So I believe in the people. I believe in the working class.”

In 2015, Sigcho’s platform included support for small businesses, “green” development initiatives, anti-gentrification policies and expanded policing.

There were comic moments, as attendees heckled Ramirez-Rosa about his endorsement of Preckwinkle, earning loud protests from DSA members. Rather than being treated as a central question of political principle, open endorsement and collaboration with the United States’ oldest bourgeois party was approached like a minor disagreement over tactics.

Speaking last, Socialist Alternative’s Kshama Sawant, a member of the Seattle city council, spoke on the “right way” to work with the Democrats, criticizing Ramirez-Rosa’s collaboration with leading Democrats and the recent endorsement.

Sawant rubs elbows at Democratic Party fundraisers, and she capitulated with the rest of the Seattle city council before Amazon in overturning a minuscule business tax under pressure from the megacorporation. The council even declared to the bourgeoisie in its letter, “We heard you.”

At the end of the speeches, a Socialist Alternative member rose to criticize Ramirez-Rosa’s endorsement of Preckwinkle, saying, “We have the opportunity to hold a sitting alderman’s feet to the fire.” DSA members again complained loudly, and SA organizers quickly shut him down and pulled him aside.

There are no principled differences between the DSA and Socialist Alternative. Both are seeking to provide a political cover for the Democratic Party, aware of growing opposition among young people and workers to the entire political system.

Since the election of Trump, the Democrats have sought to channel all opposition to the administration behind the right-wing, pro-war agenda of sections of the military and intelligence apparatus. The party is currently running an unprecedented number of actual CIA agents and other intelligence operatives for office in the 2018 elections.

Groups like the DSA and Socialist Alternative speak for privileged sections of the upper-middle class, including factions of the trade union apparatus, that support the policies of the Democrats and are seeking some way to give them a “left” gloss, the better to prevent a genuine socialist movement of the working class.



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