

At Chicago Mayoral Forum

Unions promote corporate Democrats to succeed Rahm Emanuel

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On November 19, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) hosted a mayoral forum for five of the 17 declared candidates standing in the February 2019 mayor's race. The forum sponsors included unions and political organizations closely affiliated with the Illinois Democratic Party, and it was hosted by *Sun-Times* columnist Evan Moore.

The event was titled "The Great Displacement: Mayoral Forum on Reversing African-American Push-out and Building a Chicago for the Many." It purported to address the concerns of working-class families in a city that is increasingly inhospitable to anyone but the top 20 percent of income earners, as rents and living costs climb and schools and social services remain under relentless attack. ("Push-out" refers to the tens of thousands who have left the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois in recent years, a significant portion of whom are African-American.)

But far from addressing the concerns of working families, the candidates were being quizzed on what they had to offer to serve the interests of an aspiring layer of upper-middle-class African-Americans, including black capitalists and a section of the union bureaucracy.

Most of the candidates referred to the city's financial situation, but the population loss added a new facet to the long-standing austerity narrative. None of the candidates denounced the tired lie that there is "no money" for public services—a lie promoted by the Democrats, unions and pseudo-left organizations alike.

Several of the candidates spoke of needed infrastructure like jobs, hospitals, schools, transit and mental health care, but when it came infrastructure, the political framework of the forum allowed the

candidates to quickly douse any hopes, simply by noting that Chicago's population loss could make additional infrastructure hard to justify.

But none of the candidates proposed any challenge to the massive wealth controlled by the ruling class, which would be essential to the funding of any major revitalization. Instead, the discussion centered on which organizations and social layers might benefit from the new direction for Chicago after Democrat Rahm Emanuel departs City Hall after two terms in office.

Just two weeks after the most expensive governor's race in US history, in which the Democrats' billionaire heir to the Hyatt fortune J. B. Pritzker ousted billionaire Republican Governor Bruce Rauner, no mention was made of the record amounts pumped into the November elections. To do so would have undercut the political framing of the event, which was that tough decisions are going to continue to be made, and to determine who would benefit from the choices made by these five candidates, four of whom are "women of color."

The five forum participants were

* Lori Lightfoot: Once a state prosecutor, Lightfoot is a leading fixture in the city's police reform efforts, having led the Chicago Police Board (the nominal civilian oversight body) and the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force, a body established by Emanuel in the aftermath of the killing of teenager Laquan McDonald by a Chicago cop and its cover-up by city officials.

* Toni Preckwinkle: One of the biggest cogs in the Illinois Democratic machine, Preckwinkle is currently Cook County board president and chair of the Cook County Democratic Party. The former alderman is a close ally of the Clintons and has been promoted as a

“progressive” as far back as the mid-1990s by the Democratic Socialists of America. She played a key role in the promotion of Barack Obama during his time in Illinois.

* Susana Mendoza: A leading figure in the Democratic Latino caucus, she was just re-elected comptroller of the state of Illinois. Formerly the Chicago city clerk and a state representative, she enjoys the support of a powerful section of the Illinois political machine, including Michael Madigan and Emanuel.

* Amara C. Enyia: Also a mayoral candidate in the 2015 race, Enyia is currently director of the Austin Chamber of Commerce on the city’s far west side. A vocal proponent of black capitalism, Kanye West has given more than \$73,000 to her campaign and Chance the Rapper publicly endorsed her. Enyia began her political career working in the policy office of Mayor Richard M. Daley.

* Paul Vallas: Formerly Chicago Public Schools chief, former budget director under Daley and one-time Democratic candidate for Illinois lieutenant governor, Vallas is best known as the school “turnaround” specialist responsible for the massive restructuring of public school systems involving the expansion of charter schools in Chicago, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The forum took place on the same day as the ballot access deadline for the mayoral election, a process that involves candidates turning in tens of thousands of voter signatures to meet the 12,500 required.

In orchestrating such an election kick-off event, the CTU has entered a new phase in its role as part of the bourgeois political establishment in Chicago, deepening its integration into the Democratic Party. The CTU is now led by International Socialist Organization (ISO) member Jesse Sharkey, as president, and Stacy Davis Gates, vice president.

Sharkey, having fraudulently declared in September that Emanuel’s decision not to run for re-election is a victory for the working class, is now politically responsible for putting before teachers and other workers the choice of one among these five pro-business Democrats.

The ISO’s *Socialist Worker* explained quite clearly in a recent comment that the organization and its partners wish to be courted by the Democrats: “If we simply take their word and gift them our support, neither

Preckwinkle nor any other mayoral candidate will deliver on their promises. Change doesn’t come from the politicians making promises. It’s created when movements from below make demands and engage in direct actions to win those demands from whomever happens to be holding office.”

Just how far the ISO and the other pseudo-left outfits working in and around the CTU and the Democratic Party are willing to go was established by the presence of a vicious enemy of public education on the stage. This was the Democrats’ time-tested education “reformer,” Vallas, who offered blunt answers to the moderator’s questions: Uncomfortable changes are coming and he can be relied upon to promote certain interests.

Vallas spoke directly of having provided contracts in the past to black and brown businesses. He claimed future construction projects will hire black and brown workers and businesses, and that schools will hire black and brown teachers. On November 16, Vallas released a plan to “right-size,” which is to say, further cut down, the Chicago Public Schools amid declining enrollment. He claims to be “reimagining schools” to meet the needs of residents, and not planning to shut them down. But this is simply not credible given the Democratic Party’s record.

Several high-profile candidates were not invited to the forum, including another set of politicos from the Democratic Party machine: Gery Chico, once a Daley chief of staff who challenged Emanuel in 2011; investment banker Bill Daley, brother of Richard M. Daley and, like Emanuel, a former Obama White House Chief of Staff; and former Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy, appointed by Emanuel. McCarthy, who was fired amid the public outrage over the murder of 17-year-old McDonald in 2014 by Chicago cop Jason Van Dyke and its cover-up by the Emanuel administration, is running a far-right law-and-order campaign.



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