

# Widespread popular disgust with Chicago council elections

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*This is part two of an article on the Chicago municipal elections. Part one covered the mayoral candidates.*

Like other cities, Chicago is characterized by extraordinary levels of social inequality, and the municipal elections demonstrate this. All municipal policy is geared to the fiscal limits laid down by the billionaires and big business, leaving virtually no funds for social services or wage and benefit increases for public sector workers. After decades of cuts and givebacks, there are many major issues and areas where reinvestment is needed: housing, transit infrastructure, schools, hospitals and health care centers.

The right-wing Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the bulk of the city council (the board of aldermen) are nothing more than hired hands for the big corporations. The candidates of the so-called progressive wing of the Democrats support expanded policing and new revenue schemes, including gambling and marijuana, that leave the vast accumulated wealth of the financial aristocracy virtually untouched.

The November elections confirmed the domination of big business politics in Illinois state government, with billionaire Democrat J.B. Pritzker (Hyatt Hotels) elected governor of Illinois. In the Chicago municipal elections, a section of the pseudo-left is seeking to reproduce the success of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the DSA member who won election to a congressional seat in New York City.

There are eight candidates for alderman backed either by the Chicago Teachers Union, whose president, Jesse Sharkey, is a member of the International Socialist Organization, or by the Democratic Socialists of America. Two are incumbents and six are challengers, and they could become a significant faction of the 50-member board that sets city policies and approves the budget.

Given the decades-long discrediting of the Democratic Party, which has ruled the city for nearly nine decades, a low voter turnout is anticipated. The political strategy of the pseudo-left is not based on increasing turnout, however. (Ocasio-Cortez won her primary with only 15,000 votes, defeating the incumbent Joseph Crowley who received only

11,000 votes.)

In addition to its support for and active involvement in the mayoral campaign of Cook County Board President and Cook County Democratic Chair Toni Preckwinkle, the Chicago Teachers Union is also fielding four candidates for city council. The 10th ward incumbent is CTU activist Sue Sadlowski Garza, alderwoman on the far south side and daughter of the late United Steelworkers leader Ed Sadlowski; Tara Stamps, Jenner Elementary teacher and daughter of housing rights activist and Black Panther Party leader Marion Stamps, is running in the 37th ward; Dianne Daleiden, a teacher, businesswoman and a leader of the 40th Ward Alliance (a local Sanders' Our Revolution chapter) is challenging Pat O'Connor for a second time for the far north side 40th ward; and Erika Wozniak, a teacher and co-host of a local all-women talk show "Girl Talk" is challenging James Cappleman in the 46th ward on the north side, which has seen social cleansing through real estate investment, multiple homeless encampments and protests over skyrocketing rent and housing costs. Stamps, who was endorsed by the *Sun-Times*, supported expanded policing in an interview with that paper, which has also endorsed former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot for mayor. Daleiden opted not to answer the expanded policing question.

The pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are supporting four candidates for alderman: Carlos Ramirez Rosa, Byron Sigcho Lopez, Ugo Okere and Rossana Rodriguez. Rodriguez has also been endorsed by the International Socialist Organization (ISO). Common calls issued from these candidates include an elimination of the state law banning rent control ordinances in order to combat rising rents and the imposition of a "LaSalle Street Tax" on financial transactions at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and Chicago Board Options Exchange.

Some of these candidates support "participatory budgeting and community-driven development," which are fundamentally aimed at making the budgeting process appear more democratic while providing a mechanism to reallocate resources to the upper-middle-class layers they

represent.

**Carlos Ramirez-Rosa** is running for re-election as alderman of the 35th ward, which includes the northwest side neighborhoods of Albany Park, Irving Park, Avondale and Logan Square. He has received endorsements from the CTU, Service Employees International Union locals, the Democratic Party, DSA and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. He is the official Democratic Party-endorsed candidate in the election, having proved himself during his first term as a reliable prop and left cover. He endorsed Preckwinkle early last fall, to the consternation and embarrassment of his pseudo-left allies.

Ramirez-Rosa was initially selected to be the running mate for Democrat Daniel Biss' gubernatorial campaign, in which Biss was trying to position himself to the left of Pritzker and Chris Kennedy. Ramirez-Rosa was only too happy to play the role of left cover until his association with the nationalist Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) movement directed against Israel was discovered and he was unceremoniously dumped by the Biss campaign for crossing that line of the Democratic Party establishment.

**Rossana Rodriguez**, a teacher originally from Puerto Rico, has been endorsed by the International Socialist Organization, DSA, CTU, SEIU and other unions, and Chicago Boricua Resistance.

In an interview with *Jacobin* she expressed how she decided to become involved in politics, underscoring the middle-class approach taken by many of these pseudo-left candidates, that all it takes to shift politics is the election of the right people and pressure "from below." In response to a suggestion that she run for office she said, "Then I started thinking, well, we—people like me—don't occupy those spaces enough. Maybe it is time for us to be occupying those places."

In line with the DSA's efforts in recent months, Rodriguez's campaign makes affordable housing the central issue in the election. While she supports a moratorium on new charter schools, she notably does not call for their end, and says she supports the "efforts of charter school educators to unionize and advocate for the interests of their teachers, paraprofessionals, and students," a process that has been underway for more than five years.

**Byron Sigcho-Lopez** is a public policy researcher at the University of Illinois-Chicago and leader of the Pilsen Alliance community organization. Once a candidate in the 2015 ward elections, Sigcho has since "discovered" his own socialist politics, joined the DSA and is running again in the 25th ward, which includes parts of the city's southwest side, including Pilsen, Little Village, Chinatown, McKinley Park and the West Loop. Sigcho-Lopez, a native of Ecuador, has the endorsement of the DSA and the CTU.

**Byron Sigcho-Lopez** with *Jacobin* became involved in politics through the campaign to stop the school closures initiated by Rahm Emanuel. Despite the CTU's claims to have opposed the school closings, the union was responsible for paving the way for the closures by shutting down the 2012 teachers strike on terms friendly to Emanuel's plan for mass layoffs.

Sigcho-Lopez offers that electing socialists can combat public corruption, the major pillar of his campaign, stating, "A socialist becoming part of government and really serving the people creates a new norm."

**Ugo Okere** is another DSA endorsed candidate. The 22-year-old Loyola University graduate originally from Nigeria is running for alderman in the 40th ward, on the city's far north side. His opponent is long-time alderman Patrick O'Connor. Okere became involved in politics through the Black Lives Matter movement while in college and has put forward a program of police reform, supporting the creation of a Civilian Police Accountability Council (CPAC) to "rein in police misconduct."

He has also campaigned on the issue of race, noting that O'Connor was one of the "Vrdolyak 29," a group of aldermen who opposed then Mayor Harold Washington's legislative agenda. He has also advocated rent control, noting the lack of affordable housing in the 40th ward, as well as a LaSalle Street tax.

One other high-profile race is in the 14th ward, where the recent arrest of the city's longest-serving alderman, Ed Burke, has prompted a number of Democratic Party hopefuls to take advantage of the scandal. Burke's southwest side 14th ward is majority-Hispanic and he faces four challengers, all of them Hispanic.

Former county commissioner and newly-elected Congressman Jesus "Chuy" Garcia endorsed a Burke opponent from his own organization, 28-year-old Tanya Patino. She supports increased policing, claiming in a *South Side Weekly* interview that this represents her constituents' wishes for lower crime. It was in the 14th ward that Chicago police officer Jason van Dyke shot Laquan McDonald 16 times in 2014.



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