

The Democratic Socialists of America pleads with Biden not to appoint Rahm Emanuel

Kristina Betinis**25 November 2020**

Leaders of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the *Nation* magazine and Democratic Party elected officials in New York are pleading with President-elect Joe Biden not to appoint former Obama administration official and two-term Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel to a position in the incoming administration.

Emanuel is reported to be angling for an appointment as transportation secretary in the Biden administration. *Crain's Chicago Business* indicated on Monday that Biden may be considering Emanuel for US Trade Representative, an office reporting directly to the president.

DSA member and Chicago Alderperson Rossana Rodriguez Sanchez is circulating a petition to Biden outlining their case. Rodriguez cites several of the many reactionary policies and crimes of Emanuel in the course of his tenure as Chicago mayor.

These include the police murder of teenager Laquan McDonald and the subsequent cover-up by the police, city council and the mayor's office; the single largest public school closure in US history—49 elementary schools in 2013; the closing of public mental health facilities; several rounds of tax breaks and incentives to business interests; paying out hundreds of millions in police misconduct settlements; maintaining executive control over the school board; privatizing city services; and a proposed transit project hatched by Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

One could go on to add many, many more items to this list, including Emanuel's role in the Democrats' "law and order" policies under the Clinton and Obama administrations, the operation of a "black site" by the Chicago Police Department, etc.

The DSA's campaign against an appointment for Emanuel is founded on a political fraud.

First and foremost is the notion that Emanuel is somehow an aberration in the Democratic Party. Whether or not Emanuel is appointed by Biden to one or another post will not alter the character of the incoming administration. Emanuel's politics are the politics of the Democratic Party, a party of militarism, austerity and reaction.

This is what the DSA is trying desperately to cover up. Rodriguez writes to Biden, "If you want to root out systemic racism, defend democracy, and build a society that leaves no one behind—all worthy goals mentioned in your victory speech—we can think of few people worse for the job than the man who earned the nickname 'Mayor 1 percent.'

New York Representative-elect Mondaire Jones tweeted: "I believe the Biden administration is sincerely committed to dismantling systemic racism. Giving Rahm Emanuel a cabinet position would threaten that vital work." University of Illinois at Chicago labor historian and *Jacobin* magazine contributor Jeff Schuhreke commented on the petition to explain the problem Emanuel's appointment poses for the DSA: "President-elect Biden can't claim to champion Black people/working people and then appoint Rahm to his Cabinet."

For the DSA, the appointment of Emanuel is a public relations problem. His appointment, they counsel Biden, will undermine Democrats' efforts to fraudulently portray the Democratic Party as a progressive organization, and therefore also make the DSA's own operation to present it as such more difficult.

The immediate response of Biden to his electoral victory was to call for "unity" with Republicans, even as President Donald Trump continues to refuse to accept the results of the election and stokes fascistic

violence. Leading Democrats and their closest Republican allies, like Ohio's John Kasich, have insisted "socialists" nearly lost Biden the election and must be rooted out of American politics.

Second, the DSA is attempting to cover up its own role as a political agency of the Democratic Party, in general, and in collaborating with Emanuel, in particular.

What one does not find in Rodriguez's letter is who Emanuel's reliable partners were in his viciously anti-working class policies. While the mayor of Chicago has a great deal of power over life in the city, Emanuel enjoyed the support and cooperation of the Democratic political establishment at every level of government.

All of the city council members present voted to pay Laquan McDonald's family a record-setting \$5 million as part of the effort to cover up the police murder.

The partner in the closure of 49 schools was the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which shut down the powerful September 2012 teachers strike on terms that weakened tenure and seniority in preparation for Emanuel's layoff of thousands of teachers and the closure of schools.

The DSA, *Jacobin* and the entire pseudo-left fraternity joined hands in proclaiming the sell-out of the teachers strike a great victory. The *World Socialist Web Site* campaigned against the deal and won widespread support among teachers, who at one point rebelled against efforts by the CTU to shut down the strike. We warned that the agreement reached "was an unambiguous victory for Emanuel."

The end of the strike was immediately followed by the mass closure of schools. The CTU jointly conducted the 2012-13 school closure hearings with the city of Chicago and Chicago Public Schools. These excruciatingly painful and degrading events went on for months in churches and cafeterias all over the city, pitting households and neighborhoods against one another in a bid for school funding.

What the internal factions of the Democratic Party are doing now to promote illusions in Biden they did in 2019 after Lori Lightfoot, a former prosecutor and police board president who was later appointed by Emanuel to his fraudulent "police reform" efforts, was elected mayor. While she was not their candidate of choice in the election, the "progressive" faction of the Democrats, most vocal among them the CTU,

promoted Lightfoot as a progressive once she took office in spring 2019. These lies were exploded in a matter of weeks.

Throughout the summer of 2019, Lightfoot prepared an assault on teachers. Teachers fought back against stagnant wages, practically non-existent support services and overcrowded, filthy classrooms lacking basic necessities. Amid immense social anger, the CTU shut down the 11-day strike, the longest in 30 years, and sent teachers back to work before they even had the right to vote on the utterly inadequate agreement. Even American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten was forced to declare, "This TA [tentative agreement] is not perfect, but we want to close this chapter, and we want the mayor to be with us in closing this chapter."

The DSA plays a critical role in maintaining the fiction that the Democratic Party can be pressured to implement policies of social reform. Nationally, the DSA and *Jacobin* are currently engaged in campaign to promote illusions in a "progressive" Biden administration.

The DSA hopes that convincing Biden not to appoint Emanuel will help prevent masses of workers and youth from coming into conflict with the Democratic Party and a Biden-led government. Its efforts to cover up the reality of the Democratic Party, however, will founder on the reality of a reactionary administration and a growing wave of social anger and unrest.



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