

Democrats look to corporate CEOs in Georgia attack on voting rights

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The Republican Party is advancing its campaign to suppress voting rights around the country. So far in 2021, state legislatures have introduced 361 bills that would restrict access to the ballot for millions of people. Fifty-five of these bills are currently progressing through state legislatures and five have been signed into law.

These bills largely employ similar restrictions, imposing greater constraints on early voting, voter ID requirements and mail-in voting. The purpose of these bills is to frustrate the voting process and impose restrictions that make voting, particularly voting by mail, more difficult, if not entirely impractical for many elderly and impoverished people.

A bill passed in Iowa in early March shortens the number of early voting days from 29 to 20, reduces voting hours on election day, and requires that mail-in ballots be received by the close of in-person voting. Similar bills moving through the Texas state senate would limit early voting, place restrictions on mail-in voting and effectively reduce the number of polling places available to urban voters.

Georgia's latest voting law has garnered the greatest amount of attention from the media and Democratic politicians. The law imposes certain restrictions on voting access, namely greater identification requirements, reduced voting hours and restrictions on mail-in voting.

The response of the Democratic Party to these laws has been utterly feckless. Despite having denounced these laws as the rise of the "new Jim Crow," the Democratic Party has done nothing to seriously oppose them. Protests organized by voter advocacy groups in Georgia have been sporadic and sparsely attended, and even the suggestion of mass protests has been completely absent from political discourse in and

around the Democratic Party.

Instead, the Democratic Party has done everything in its power to channel popular opposition to restrictive voting laws behind efforts to plead with corporations to pressure the Georgia state government by pulling out investments or boycotting the state.

In the past two weeks hundreds of corporate executives have released statements criticizing Georgia's voting law. Major Georgia-based corporations such as Coca-Cola, Home Depot, Delta Airlines and UPS have all released statements declaring their commitment to voting rights, with Coca-Cola CEO James Quincey calling the law "unacceptable."

The *Washington Post* celebrated this alleged mobilization of big business in defense of democracy with a front-page headline in its Monday edition, "CEOs prioritize voting rights," reporting an online meeting of more than 100 corporate leaders that "represents an aggressive dialing up of corporate America's stand against controversial voting measures nationwide ..."

Among these purported defenders of democratic rights was Doug McMillon, CEO of Walmart, the largest employer of low-wage labor in America, and James Murdoch, the "dissident" younger son of Rupert Murdoch, owner of the media empire that includes Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*. James Murdoch was head of 21st Century Fox, the movie portion of the Murdoch holdings, until it was sold to Disney in 2019.

The CEO of Delta Airlines, Ed Bastian, was invited but unable to attend. He has already issued statements criticizing Republican bills restricting voters in Georgia and Texas. Delta Airlines recently displayed its concern for the American people by restoring seating in middle seats on its airliners, which had been kept empty because of coronavirus concerns. Evidently the slogan

of Delta is that we want you to be able to vote, but not to live.

The most high profile corporate action in response to the Georgia law came from Major League Baseball, which moved this summer's All-star game from Atlanta in protest. Again, the outrage of the billionaire baseball executives is quite selective: they have reopened stadiums, cramming in as many as 40,000 fans at a time to watch games, under conditions of a raging pandemic, with little effort to enforce mask-wearing and under conditions where social distancing is impossible.

The wave of corporate statements was preceded by calls from Georgia voting organizations and faith groups for a boycott of companies that did not publicly denounce the law. Both the appeals to corporations and the threat of boycotts were political stunts designed to block any genuine mobilization of working class opposition against the attack on democratic rights.

Demonstrating the pure cynicism of this effort, the leading organizer of the campaign, Bishop Reginald Jackson, called off the boycott on April 7 in order to meet with CEOs from several major corporations on April 13 in a closed-door meeting.

Meanwhile, sections of the Democratic Party in Georgia have reversed themselves on the boycott of the state, demonstrating that it is business and corporate interests that dictate the political program of the Democratic Party.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms said during a press conference, "I am not in favor of a boycott of the state of Georgia. .. because it's impacting our local economy." Georgia Democrat Stacey Abrams expressed similar concerns, saying, "I don't want to see Georgia families hurt by lost events and jobs. Georgians targeted by voter suppression will be hurt as opportunities go to other states. We should not abandon the victims of [Republican] malice and lies—we must stand together."

Georgia's new Democratic senators were equally resistant to the idea of a boycott, with Sen. Raphael Warnock commenting, "It is my hope that businesses, athletes, and entertainers can protest this law not by leaving Georgia but by coming here and fighting voter suppression head on."

If one asks Warnock and other leading Democrats what "fighting" voter suppression consists of, there will

be no suggestion of any appeal to the population whose democratic rights are under attack. On the contrary, they seek to make common cause with their "allies" on Wall Street.

The opposition of corporations and banks to the Republican attack on voting rights is not entirely for show. There is genuine concern that the ultra-right, Trump-loyal faction may be going too far in its provocative actions, and may generate a political response in the working class that would threaten fundamental corporate interests.

This concern was best exemplified by JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon in his statement to shareholders published last week. Dimon, who has also criticized the Georgia voting law and the January 6 attack on Congress by Trump-aligned fascists, wrote about his concern that too much inequality could spark social unrest and threaten American imperialism. "The problems that are tearing at the fabric of American society require all of us—government, business and civic society—to work together with a common purpose."

This "common purpose" should include "to maintain America's preeminent role in the world," he said. Dimon also warned about the turn of working people to socialist politics, saying that "Our failures fuel the populism on both the political left and right," and that the United States is facing the question of "capitalism versus other economic systems," i.e., socialism.

These are the concerns that are animating the turn of some corporations against Republican attempts to restrict voting rights.



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