

Brandon Johnson, backed by Sanders, CTU and DSA, elected mayor of Chicago

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County Commissioner and Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) legislative official Brandon Johnson won the runoff election for mayor of Chicago on Tuesday, defeating former schools CEO Paul Vallas, who had the backing of the party establishment and the Fraternal Order of Police.

The election outcome was a surprise to big business and the corporate media, which had projected a Vallas victory since he finished well ahead of eight other candidates in the February 28 primary. Johnson narrowly won second place, qualifying for the runoff, while incumbent Mayor Lori Lightfoot finished third and was eliminated.

The run-off election was a contest between rival factions of the Democratic Party. Vallas enjoyed the all-out support of the Fraternal Order of Police, as well as the building trades and firefighters unions, while Johnson was backed by the CTU, SEIU, the United Working Families organization and the Democratic Socialists of America. Most business interests backed Vallas, and his campaign outspent Johnson's by nearly two to one.

The *Chicago Tribune* described the election as “a stunning rebuke of the political establishment,” and the *New York Times* claimed it would be an example for how Democrats should address the issues of crime and policing in 2024. With the media and the Democrats focused entirely on the issue of “law and order,” Johnson went back on his pledge to cut the police department's astronomical \$2 billion budget, claiming later in the race he would not “cut one penny” from the police.

According to the Chicago Board of Elections, Johnson got 287,551 votes to 271,443 for Vallas. About 33 percent of voters participated, and a reported 90,000 mail-in ballots are still uncounted. Notably, a very small portion of youth under 24 voted, only 3.3 percent of those registered, indicating wide dissatisfaction with the candidates and the political system as a whole.

Last week Bernie Sanders held a “get out the vote” event at the University of Illinois Chicago in which he appealed for youth and students to go to the polls, but this had little

impact, apparently.

Johnson, who is black, won all 16 majority African American wards and five of the 14 majority Hispanic wards. But published analysis of the voting demographics indicates that a surge in voter participation on the north side lakefront wards, middle class and historically liberal, put Johnson over the top.

In what were Mayor Lori Lightfoot's first comments to the press in the weeks since her defeat in the February 28 primary election, she offered advice to Johnson regarding police and firefighters. “Be humble. Be grateful. ... When you've seen what I've seen, when you have to make calls that I've had to make, you better be humble, and you better be grateful. It's hard to motivate people when they don't think their leader has their back, and it's absolutely essential. It's why I go to roll calls. ... I thank the Lord every single day for the first responders.”

Two Chicago firefighters have died in recent days from fire-related injuries.

On MSNBC's “Morning Joe” program, Al Sharpton interviewed Johnson, asking, “How do you deal with crime now and the Fraternal Order of Police?” The FOP's fascist President John Catanzara had said of the now mayor-elect: “If this guy gets in, we are going to see an exodus like we've never seen. There will be blood in the streets.”

Sharpton asked, “How do you now deal with crime and at the same time deal with the base that built this infrastructure that you won by, who is concerned about police reform?”

Johnson replied, “It's going to take a collective response. We have district council members,” referring to the newly-created 66 seats of the police district council, a fig leaf body whose members have no oversight authority, “the faith community, business owners small and large, violence prevention orgs, community-based organizations and of course the office of mayor... what's required in this moment is real collaboration.

“We tend to limit our conversations around toughness and

more police officers, and what has been proven over and over again is that is not a recipe for absolute success. And so our mission ... we get at the immediate dynamic of public safety, and we also set up long-term solutions. Everything from economic development, affordable housing, health care, including mental health care. ... It's a comprehensive approach.

"I don't believe there is a difference between me and the police department. Now what the Fraternal Order of Police leader has said, that doesn't necessarily reflect the values of the city of Chicago." He said his administration "is going to sit down with the police department."

In campaigning, Johnson initially promised to cut the police budget by \$150 million by closing the Homan Square "black site," where thousands of residents have been detained without arrest and at least one man killed, and ending the \$33 million contract with ShotSpotter, a gunshot surveillance and alert system. He has since pledged not to cut "one penny" from the police budget.

The central element of Johnson's campaign was his pledge to raise \$800 million in new tax revenue to support social spending, for schools, transit, youth programs and mental health. The specifics of this platform he referred to as "a living document," which means that his promise to tax the rich, like his pledge to cut and redirect police funding, means nothing.

There was no shortage of empty populist bombast on election night. Johnson opened his victory speech declaring, "Tonight is the gateway to a new future for our city."

He also claimed his campaign is the end and aim of the work of Martin Luther King Jr. "The civil rights movement and the labor rights movement have finally collided. We are experiencing the very dream of the greatest man who ever walked the earth. On this very day 55 years ago, Dr. King stood on a balcony. But you all know it's very clear that one bullet can't kill a dream," Johnson said.

Promoting illusions that the capitalist system can accommodate the needs of working people, he continued, "We don't have to choose between rich and poor, old and young. We don't have to choose between toughness and compassion. If tonight is proof of anything, it's that false choices don't serve Chicago any longer."

The 14 remaining seats on the Board of Aldermen (city council) were also filled in the runoff vote. Some 36 candidates won an outright majority in the primary. The most significant result is the increase in the number of members from the Democratic Socialists of America, from five to six. The DSA backed Johnson in both the primary

and the general election and will undoubtedly play a significant role in his administration.

Carlos Ramirez Rosa, a leader of the DSA contingent on the city council, wasted no time appealing to the conservative supporters of the Vallas campaign, declaring: "I know many voted against [Johnson] based upon the far-right opposition's misinformation and fear campaign, but I am confident that their fears will disappear when they get to know the Brandon I have known for many years, a God-fearing and God-loving family man, a uniter, a coalition builder, who will be a mayor for ALL of Chicago, for every block and every neighbor."

Alderwoman Rossana Rodriguez Sanchez said, "Brandon Johnson will come into the fifth floor [of City Hall] with a team of progressive alders who will support him [and] work with him to deliver the things we have all been running on and that our communities need. It is a new day because we are not in this with him in a transactional way. ... We will show what it looks like to govern from a place of love and with a vision for a city that cares for everyone."

For all its "left" pretensions and populist rhetoric, Johnson's administration, like the CTU and DSA, will be a loyal servant to the ruling class, demonstrating the dead end of reforming the Democratic Party. The Johnson administration will be charged with carrying out far-reaching attacks on jobs, wages and social services, under the pressures of ongoing budget crises.

The next mayor faces an estimated \$500-600 million budget deficit for the next fiscal year as a result of the end of federal pandemic funds, lower tax revenue from tourism and downtown business, as well as a fall in pension assets. The Chicago Public Schools is also expected to see its own deficit increase to \$628 million for the 2025-2026 school year.

Sooner rather than later, the new mayor and his backers in the union officialdom and the pseudo-left will come into direct conflict with the working class. Workers and young people must prepare accordingly.



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