

Record low primary turnout as Chicago Democrats shift further to the right

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Voter turnout in the Illinois Democratic primary election March 26 set an all-time low as the capitalist party shifts further to the right and becomes entirely identified with the genocidal war being carried out by Israel in Gaza, with the full support of the Biden administration.

Biden recorded just over 700,000 votes out of over 6.5 million registered voters, an indictment of the Democratic president in a state long considered to be a party stronghold. Chicago is to host the Democratic National Convention in August. A number of protests are planned during the event and the city of Chicago has denied permits to the organizers.

The last two presidential primary elections in Illinois have seen significant drops in turnout reflecting the disgust and alienation from the two-party monopoly and its policies of austerity and war. The 2020 presidential primary saw a turnout of 37.8 percent, down from 2016's 53.5 percent. According to local media reports, the great majority of voters coming out on election day were over 55.

Biden's pro-genocide line is particularly provocative in Chicago, which has the largest Palestinian population of any American city. Among Chicago and Cook County voters who did go to the polls, nearly 12 percent refused to vote for Biden and wrote in "Gaza" or left the presidential slot blank. Another 12 percent selected candidates other than Biden, including Dean Phillips and Marianne Williamson.

This means that among those in the Chicago area who voted on the Democratic ballot, more than 20 percent rejected Biden as the candidate. When accounting for those eligible to vote who did not cast ballots, only 6 percent of Chicagoans chose Biden as their presidential nominee.

The election saw the lowest voter turnout in

Chicago's history with only about 20 percent of eligible voters casting a ballot. Chicago Board of Elections official Max Bever called the turnout on election day "shockingly low." More Chicago residents voted in the local race for Cook County State's Attorney than cast a ballot for President of the United States, a result unique in Chicago election history.

For several days after polls closed, the race for the Democratic nomination for Cook County State's Attorney was too close to call as ballots were being counted by hand. The candidates for the nomination, which is tantamount to election in the heavily Democratic county, which includes Chicago, were Eileen O'Neill Burke and Clayton Harris.

A former prosecutor and judge, O'Neill Burke campaigned on promises to increase felony prosecutions, claiming she would target gun violence, to protect abortion rights in Illinois, and institute ethics training in the State's Attorney's office. She also enjoyed the endorsement of the fascist Fraternal Order of Police President John Cantanzara.

On March 29, Cantanzara released a video stating: "The members who took our advice and pulled a Democratic ballot, contrary to what you may have done for the last several primary elections by pulling Republican ballots: Every vote counted and your votes going Democratic this time made the difference to get Judge O'Neill Burke across the finish line to try and save this city before it is lost forever."

In the days after the election, O'Neill Burke claimed she was unfairly labeled a "law and order" candidate. O'Neill Burke's campaign was supported by investors at Citadel and other big business figures including Richard Melman and Craig Duchoissois.

Clayton Harris was backed by Democratic Party and Cook County Board Chair Toni Preckwinkle, the

Chicago Teachers Union, Service Employees International Union, Teamsters and local Democratic Party mega-donor Fred Eychaner.

O'Neill Burke won the State's Attorney primary with just 50.15 percent of the votes. Since securing victory she has been fully embraced by the Democratic Party leadership, including Preckwinkle.

Far from trying to win back those voters who opposed Biden over Gaza, the Democratic Party leadership has moved further to the right. In the immediate aftermath of the primary, a group of right-wing Democrats on the Chicago board of alderman (the city council) tried to oust Alderman Byron Sigcho-Lopez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, from a leadership position, as chair of the housing committee.

Sigcho-Lopez spoke at a protest against the US-backed Israeli genocide on March 22 at which a Marine veteran, Zachary Kam, burned a US flag and denounced his own personal role in US neocolonial wars.

Right-wingers in the Democratic and Republican parties as well as local news media seized on the event. Local outlet ABC 7 headlined a report that suggested Sigcho-Lopez himself burned the flag: "Sigcho-Lopez asked to step down from leadership role; mayor defends him after American flag burning."

Right-wing Democrats on the board of aldermen, including Aids. Chris Taliaferro and Bill Conway, son of the billionaire chairman of the Carlyle Group and a Navy reserve intelligence officer, raised the demand to remove Sigcho-Lopez from his housing committee position.

On Monday April 1, the board of aldermen voted on the censure motion, but it was soon clear that it would not pass, and it went down to defeat by a margin of 29-16. Taliaferro himself ended up voting against it. He claimed to have had a change of heart the day before the vote, saying of Sigcho-Lopez, "I can accept his apology and that is enough for me [instead of] removing him from this position."

Last November, another DSA alderman, Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, was forced out as floor leader and chief of the zoning committee as Mayor Johnson was moving to the right, particularly on the question of migrants from Latin America. The mayor evidently requested Ramirez-Rosa step down after a controversy was

manufactured by right-wing members of the city council.



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