

Should Chicago Unions Have Backed a Socialist Instead of Chuy García?

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The "See, we told you so!" reaction by socialists to Rahm Emmanuel's victory over Jesús "Chuy" García in the recent mayoral runoff was as predictable as it was hypocritical. Scott Jay's article in *New Politics* is but one example of this kind of reaction which combines self-vindication and bravado with an utter lack of awareness of Chicago's political terrain. This know-it-all know-nothingism becomes painfully obvious when Jay writes:

"[Socialist Tim] Meegan would have lost a substantial number of votes if he ran against Garcia, but if the goal was to create a political organizing space that can fight lesser-evilism, then it would have been more than worth it. However, it would have been extremely unpopular and would have been met with widespread hostility by most of the labor movement."

So according to Jay, Meegan should not only have refused to endorse García, he should have run against him.

This seems like a reasonable stand for a socialist to take, until you recognize the following:

- Meegan was already running for alderman in the 33rd ward, making it impossible to run for two positions at once.
- Meegan lost the three-way race in his ward by a hefty margin, 2,779 votes to the incumbent Deborah Mell's 4,103. (Mell narrowly escaped being forced into a runoff by dozens of votes).
- Meegan would have been easily eliminated in the primary just as Emmanuel's and García's opponents were.
- It takes 12,500 petition signatures to get a candidate on the ballot for mayor in the first place. In practice, this means gathering three times that figure (over 36,000) to guarantee that a sufficient number of signatures survive legal challenges by rival campaigns. So even if Chicago's teachers' union leader Karen Lewis decided Scott Jay was absolutely right and ordered her entire membership to sign Meegan petitions, they'd be about 10,000 signatures short since the union has 26,000 members.

As if the above weren't bad enough, there's the fact that all of the openly socialist candidates were defeated in every ward they ran in:

- Jorge Mujica lost in the 25th ward after the “about a hundred Chicago socialists from various organizations, inspired by the election victory of Kshama Sawant in Seattle, came together to organize the Chicago Socialist Campaign” went MIA by the time it came time to actually do the hard work of campaigning for votes.
- Eco-socialist Olga Bautista was crushed in the primary, receiving only 208 votes or 2.19% in ward 10 (although the ultimate victor there was Chicago Teachers Union executive board member Susan Garza).

New Politics, Scott Jay, and everyone in the socialist movement ought to take a good long hard look in the mirror and ask what we socialists are doing wrong (and what we can do better) to serve the class we think we are worthy of leading before pointing fingers at everyone else for the failure of the American workers' movement to live up to socialist expectations and conform to socialist principles. Writing that everything would be peachy keen 'if only' we were in charge of the labor movement is the political equivalent of playing fantasy football — entertaining for sure, but inherently irrelevant to real-world developments and struggles

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