

MAY 29, 2024

Brandon Johnson Dines with Biden, While Protests at the DNC Loom on the Horizon

BY [JOE ALLEN](#)



Screen Shot from Youtube

It was a beautiful warm night on the south lawn of White House. Five hundred guests of President Biden gathered for an official state dinner for Kenyan President William Ruto on the evening of May 23rd. There were “stunning D.C. views, a knockout menu, a dose of celebrity star power and even a little family drama,” according to ABC News. Hunter, the President’s perpetually indicted son, provided the drama.

It was the usual mix of Washington dignitaries, administration officials, Hollywood stars, as well as two former Presidents — Bill Clinton and Barack Obama — and one former presidential candidate Hilary Clinton. “The menu featured fruitwood-smoked beef short ribs, poached lobster, chilled heirloom tomato soup and a white chocolate basket.” Yummy. A few hours before the sumptuous dinner, Reuters reported,

“Some of the food supplies waiting to enter the Gaza S from Egypt have begun to rot as the Rafah border

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crossing remains shut to aid deliveries for a third week and people inside the Palestinian territory face worsening hunger. Rafah was a main entry point for humanitarian relief as well as some commercial supplies before Israel stepped up its military offensive on the Gazan side of the border on May 6 and took control of the crossing from the Palestinian side.”

Nobody, including Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), one of the best known members of “The Squad,” brought up the icky subject of starvation and genocide in Gaza. Who wants to ruin a good meal and great company, especially with the President and his Secretaries of Defense and State, who are enabling it? President Biden gave an “Irish toast” and everyone went on to have a great night together, though, apparently, Obama left early.

There was an array of big city, African-American, Democratic Party Mayors present from various battleground states, the *New York Times* reported,

“The mayors of Charlotte, Phoenix, Milwaukee, Augusta and Atlanta all traveled to Washington to dine on chilled heirloom tomato soup and fruitwood-smoked beef short ribs within a few tables of the president.”

Despite the honored guest being the President Ruto of Kenya, the guest list revealed a focus on domestic politics. The President is fighting for his political life and is desperate to turn out the Black vote, which overwhelmingly supported him in large numbers in 2020 but has weakened since then.

Panic at the DNC

Among the invited guests was Chicago’s Mayor Brandon Johnson. I don’t know if Johnson had a choice table, but it’s a sure sign that you’re part of the in-crowd if you are invited to a state dinner. Illinois is a deeply blue state, it will vote for Biden, but Brandon will be the host for the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in August, which the Democrats are fearful could turn into a public relation fiasco with

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protests and arrests over Biden's support for Israel's genocidal war.

Chicago will soon be turned into a police state to protect the DNC in an effort to sideline any protests. The Johnson administration has so far denied six permit requests, missed deadlines, or ordered the police to offer protest routes far away from the DNC. The *Chicago Tribune* recently reported:

“Authorities required to offer alternative protest routes have repeatedly proposed demonstrators instead march on a two-block, tree-lined stretch of Columbus Drive in Grant Park. Organizers across the board have criticized that location as too far from the convention's hotspots, the United Center and McCormick Place, where delegates and top Democrats will congregate and the national media will focus its attention.”

Some pro-Palestine organizers have tired of waiting on Johnson and decided to march on the DNC without a permit. Pro-Palestine organizers are enraged with the city after the Chicago cops attacked the DePaul University encampment. “CPD messed it up today. So because of that, we are not filing (a permit),” said Nida Sahouri, chair of American Muslims for Palestine Chicago, as she tore up the application in front of the media. “We are going to be protesting no matter what.”

Johnson, as he often does, tries to lean on his activist past to deflect criticism. “I'm not here without that movement,” he said in March. “We just want to make sure that it is done in a safe and secure area so that that right to assemble doesn't get taken over by individuals who may have other interests.” Raising the false specter of outsiders has been used to crack down on peaceful protests on campuses across the country.

Any threat to the safety and security of the demonstrators comes not from outsiders but from the notoriously violent Chicago Police Department (CPD) or local pro-Zionist and far right vigilantes. Sometimes they are one and the same in Chicago. It should be noted Johnson and his police chief Larry Snelling have not disciplined or fired at least nine members of the fascist Proud Boys currently serving in

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CPD, despite having pledged to do so in the past. Neither contentious city council hearings or repeated calls from groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) have moved them.

Kennedy Bartley, the former executive director Illinois United Working Families (UWF), was recently hired by Johnson to be managing deputy of external relations, a job to reach out to his allies that, in some cases, have soured on him. Bartley told the *Tribune*, that her job is to “make sure that we are executing the vision Chicago elected him to execute.” How she will do that given that she now works for mayor is a good question. It would appear that her job right now is to manage protests at the DNC .

It may also be worth asking in light of Bartley’s appointment, what is the UWF for? The 2016 UWF Platform and Points of Unity, says:

“We declare our commitment to form a new political party, independent of corporate control, with a grounding in working-class communities and leadership from the emerging American majority — Black, Latino and Asian, female, queer, and young.”

Accepting a job in the Johnson administration appears to be working against the stated goal of “a new political party.” In another recent example, Alderperson Rossana Rodriguez, who has been repeatedly endorsed for office by the UWF, was elected chair of the 33rd Ward Democratic Committee. Instead of forming a new party, the UWF appears to be working for the old party, despite much of the left media promoting it as a potential organizing space of opposition to the Johnson administration.

“I’m the real Democrat”

Brandon’s embrace of the political establishment shouldn’t surprise anyone, this is how politics works in the United States. All of this was plain to see and hear while he was running for mayor in 2023. He repeatedly proclaimed,

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real Democrat for Mayor, but the left chose not to listen. His election last year was described as a “shock “ and historic opening for the broad left. Six months into his tenure as Mayor, I wrote:

“Johnson, a favorite of the labor-left, upon taking office has disappointed many supporters on several fronts, including signing a no-strike pledge with the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) during next year’s Democratic National Convention, signing a contract with GardaWorld, a dubious Blackwater-like security, to house the burgeoning migrants, and appointing Larry Snelling, the former head of the Chicago Police Department’s Counterterrorism unit, as the city’s next police chief.”

Since then, the list of things has piled up even higher. During several city council debates on Gaza, Johnson tossed pro-Palestine demonstrators from city hall. In October, he played a key role in allowing a Pro-Israel resolution, sponsored by Alderwoman Debbie Silverstein, to pass overwhelmingly. When he came around to supporting a ceasefire resolution in February, it was clear that it was popular with the Democratic Party supporters, but it also didn’t require him to do anything, not the least of which was going to a state dinner at the White House.

But, many of Johnson’s staunchest defenders that I know have gone silent in the face of his support for the newest, proposed Chicago boondoggle — a domed Chicago Bears stadium on the Lakefront. Priced at \$4.7 billion which the Bears would contribute \$2 billion and the rest would be public money. The Chicago White Sox also want a new partially public funded stadium in the south Loop. Johnson has embraced these proposals and gratuitously defended them by saying, “Having the opportunity to stand with billionaires, you could not have convinced me a decade ago that I would have the opportunity to do that.”

Not satisfied enough with the standing with Chicago billionaires, he is standing with an Italian one accordi the *Chicago Sun-Times*, “Johnson’s administration want

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give \$28 million in tax-increment financing to Rossi's lobbying client — an Italian billionaire who plans to convert one of four Loop office buildings to affordable apartments under a program that Lightfoot initiated." Such actions by previous Mayors would provoke demonstrations and sit-ins along with vocal denunciations by the Chicago left, yet we hear little to nothing.

Brandon Johnson's one year in office should make it clear that he is not on our side.

JOE ALLEN is the author of The Package King: A Rank and File History of United Parcel Service.

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