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Remembering the DNC 1968 - 2024

Same struggle, same fight

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Chicago Democratic National Convention, 1968.

In August of 1968, I was barely 19 years old and several months pregnant when I embarked on a trip with other activists to attend the protests at the Democratic Party Convention.

It was a boring and long ride from Wilmington, Delaware, to Chicago, and I don't remember much about the trip or even our sleeping arrangements on donated floor space — other than that we managed it — but I remember a lot about the streets of Chicago.

Like the thousands of other youth who had converged on Chicago, we were angry

about the Vietnam War. The Pentagon was engaged in merciless carpet bombing and napalming villagers. The costs of the war were mounting along with the deaths of working-class GIs transported back home in body bags and unloaded on the tarmacs of military airports.

We were equally ignited and inspired by the Black liberation movement expressed by the Black Panther Party during that period. The Chicago DNC took place just months after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, which sparked nationwide rebellions in major cities.

The FBI's COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) state repression against the Black movement was in full swing. And every bit of this was reflected outside and inside the convention.

While my politics were barely formed, my practical working-class instincts were polished. I quickly concluded that marching in the streets and fighting against the massive police repression was the best form of survival.

The less radical and perhaps naive youth who remained stationary in Grant Park took the brunt of Mayor Daley's police billy clubs. "Give peace a chance" was not going to cut it for either tear gas and police brutality, or for that matter, the thousands of fully armed National Guard and U.S. Army units that were called in to back up Chicago's gestapo police force.

Our group endured tear gas, but fortunately, no one got cracked over the head by a police club or sent to the hospital. The repression that took place shocked the world and was described in the later "Walker Report" as a "police riot."

Today, the rhetoric is similar. Chicago's top cop, Superintendent Larry Snelling, has already proclaimed, "We're not going to allow you to riot," promising arrests and a police crackdown. Cook County judges have announced that they are clearing their

schedules as part of Chief Judge Tim Evans' order to prepare for mass arrests.

The battle over the denial of permits for an accepted march route continues after U.S. District Judge Andrea Wood refused to force the city to alter the route proposed by the city officials. Protesters rightfully insist that the present route forces marchers into small side streets, creating unsafe conditions. Presently, the March on the DNC Coalition is being barred from using a stage or sound at Union Park.

Crisis for U.S. imperialism in 1968 and today

In both 1968 and 2024, the resistance of colonized and occupied people fueled an outpouring of protest and resistance. In 1968, it was the Vietnamese people; today, it is the resistance of the Palestinian people and the horror of the U.S.-funded genocide.

We would be remiss not to add to the above the continuing bloody U.S./NATO war in Ukraine on Russia, the not-so-cold war on China, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, and all of the covert and overt schemes U.S. imperialism has cooked up in almost every part of the globe.

None of the top Pentagon brass or capitalist bankers would want to publicly categorize either period as a crisis for the system. But they know it is so.

The Tet Offensive, launched in January 1968 on the Lunar New Year by the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, struck major cities in the southern part of Vietnam, even breaching the outer walls of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

The U.S. and the puppet South Vietnamese militaries suffered heavy losses. It proved that the liberation forces were far stronger than the Johnson administration claimed.

On Oct. 7, 2023, Palestinian liberation fighters stunned the world in a brazen and

daring attack that broke through the “iron dome.” For many of the young Palestinian fighters, it was the first time they had stepped foot on stolen land, having been confined their entire lives to the apartheid Gaza Strip, which was described as an open-air prison.

Forgotten economic crisis

March 1968 saw the largest speculative run on gold in history. Massive expenditures on the Vietnam War helped fuel inflation during that period. This crisis later became popularly referred to as stagflation, characterized by rising unemployment and rising prices.

It ushered in one of the most pivotal changes for the capitalist world market in August of 1971 when Nixon held a secret meeting at Camp David with top representatives of the imperialist banking system that resulted in the unilateral delinking of the dollar from gold in the international arena. This action was tantamount to an economic coup against any country holding dollars.

Today, capitalist contraction continues. The chilling record drop in major stock markets on Aug. 5, 2024, due to a weak job market report, attests to this.

Inside the the Conventions - 1968 and 2024

Though the circumstances were different, there are some similarities, but with one big difference. Considering that none of the capitalist candidates of 1968 represented honest and unabashed working-class interests, there was rigorous debate, which sometimes ended up with punches thrown and actual competition between different candidates.

On March 31, 1968, Johnson announced that he would not seek a second term as president. This was a direct result of the Vietnam quagmire, as it was referred to at the time. Johnson then handed the baton to his vice president, Hubert Humphrey, to

run for the presidency.

It is not all that different from Genocide Joe Biden handing over his nomination to his vice-president, Kamala Harris. A little more on that later.

Senator Robert F. Kennedy had already emerged as a major candidate in the primaries. He had just won the huge California delegate prize. It was at a Los Angeles rally that he was shot right after declaring, "Now it's on to Chicago to win there." He died the next day, on June 6. This left Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy as the favorite of Democrats opposing the war.

It should be noted that McCarthy's anti-war opposition was rather milquetoast; it certainly wasn't based on supporting the Vietnamese liberation struggle.

In fact, most of the Democratic Party opposition, while pushed by the masses in the streets and by a working class weary of the war, was based on the fact that the Vietnamese people were breaking the back of the U.S. war machine. It was tactical and still predicated on U.S. imperialist interests.

With all of its similarities, today's DNC looks different from 1968. Vice President Kamala Harris was already crowned the winner virtually on Aug. 5. For all practical purposes, Harris will have no challengers.

Those outside the U.S. might peer at the DNC spectacle and wonder how something so autocratic and scripted could even remotely be considered democratic.

The 2024 convention will be held behind a giant barrier between eight and 10 feet high and non-scalable. The feds have already appropriated \$75 million for security. So much for the Democratic Party being the party of the people.

But the echo of the streets, even if it's faint, may still be felt on the conference floor.

There is much trepidation that the uncommitted delegates, mainly from Minnesota and Michigan, will mount a protest. Given the extraordinary control and orchestration of the 2024 DNC, any form of resistance is a sign of the movement's strength.

The DNC theater spectacle

A seat at the table will cost you much more than an arm and a leg. According to Politico, prime seat packages run as high as \$5 million, which published [a breakdown of sponsorship levels](#) obtained by its Playbook column.

The Democratic Party announced its platform on July 13, and it's another piece of theater. I would bet my meager Social Security check that most workers have not waded through the 80-page meandering, demagogic nonsense that is primarily a polemic against Donald Trump.

It has very little concrete connection for workers and the poor, who are weary of high prices and worried about the future, whether it's racist police terror in the streets or at the border, or the worsening climate crisis.

And on the question of Palestine, the platform reaffirms U.S. support for Israel.

What trumps words (no pun intended) are deeds. On Aug. 13, Biden approved \$20 billion in new weapons, including F-15 fighter jets, 120mm tank ammunition, tactical vehicles, AMRAAM anti-aircraft missiles, and high-explosive mortars. Talking peace is a smokescreen while they wage war.

The Democratic and Republican Parties remain imperialist war parties of the capitalist class. It is the Pentagon generals, the banks, and the obscenely wealthy members of the ruling class that determine the real and sometimes hidden program of war and plunder.

Hubert Humphrey, who lost to Nixon, reminisced that his mistake was capitulating to Johnson on the war plank (like Kamala Harris today, he pledged his support for the war then). But there is a small part of this history that needs to be underscored, and that is the role not just of Secretary of State Dean Rusk or National Security Adviser Walt Rostow, but of General Creighton Abrams, who was the commander of the U.S. forces in Vietnam who intervened on what the final wording of Humphrey's platform would be.

You might ask yourself, what is a General doing poking himself into civil affairs, but it underscores who the real players are behind the curtain.

If we ended on this note alone, this would not only be a bad story but also untrue. The will of the masses of people, not only the youth in the streets or the working class of this country, but especially workers and the oppressed masses globally, will determine the ending.

This is true not only in some final sense but also in the coming week, regardless of how the corporate media frames the grotesque charade and spectacle before us.

When all is said and done, it is back into the streets where history is made! I intend to be at the 2024 Chicago DNC protests.

