Los Angeles: Newly-elected mayor promises more cuts and privatization

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The City of Los Angeles concluded its 2013 mayoral election this Wednesday with Democratic former city council head Eric Garcetti comfortably defeating his rival, current city controller Wendy Greuel by a 54 to 46 percent margin. Much like outgoing mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the incoming mayor is committed to an austerity agenda.

The election was most notable for its extremely low turnout, with only 19 percent of registered voters taking part. Expressing the immense gulf that exists between the working class and the two parties of big business, the election was nonetheless the most expensive in Los Angeles history with $15 million spent between the two candidates.

Also notable were the claims made by the two Democratic candidates during the course of the run-off portion of the election and even before. Unencumbered by Republican opposition, they exercised completely free rein to express their commitment to austerity measures for the working class.

Often noting that President Obama was a "personal friend," Garcetti in effect promised to deliver the president's right wing agenda on a smaller, albeit more concentrated scale.

Garcetti made clear during his campaign that he would do nothing whatsoever to address unemployment and would instead provide tax windfalls to private enterprise and the wealthy. Said the new mayor, "LA needs leadership that doesn't keep chasing yesterday's long-lost jobs, but that brings tomorrow's jobs here now."

Elaborating on this theme, Garcetti said, "One of LA's most significant problems is the gross receipts tax. Building on my successful work that eliminated the business tax for LA's small businesses and that created targeted incentives for high-growth and highly-mobile sectors such as internet firms, entertainment businesses and car dealerships, I am now the leader in working to end the tax completely."

On the problem of homelessness—Los Angeles has the largest homeless population of any American city—Garcetti made clear that he would follow in the footsteps of current Mayor Villaraigosa. Ostensibly, that means using the police department to identify homeless individuals and then provide them with newly-constructed supportive housing.

In actuality, existing and planned housing will only accommodate a tiny fraction of the homeless. Such cataloging will not be used to provide housing, food or medical care, but will be used to expand the policy of forcibly moving the homeless in order to gentrify certain portions of the city.

The media has dubbed Garcetti the "hip mayor" for driving hybrid electric cars and growing food in his own backyard, thereby completely satisfying the political expectations of wealthy Los Angeles and Hollywood liberals, who, along with the trade unions, provided the vast majority of the mayor's campaign fund.

Workers will not be satisfied by these trivial lifestyle choices, however. Far more importantly the incoming mayor is pledged to thoroughly right wing policies, which he will pursue ruthlessly.

Garcetti, who shared massive trade union support with his rival throughout the course of the campaign, promised that he would continue working with unions to push through massive cuts on city workers. Responding to criticism from Republican candidate Kevin James during the March election that he enjoyed a too cozy relationship with city unions, Garcetti countered by explicitly stating that the unions had been instrumental tools in implementing unpaid furloughs

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and pension reform.

The mayor-elect has also pledged that he would work with the unions upon entering office to eliminate $50 million from the city's budget to offset health care costs.

Despite these pledges, leading members of the SEIU—the largest city worker union—ranked both Garcetti and Greuel with an average pro-labor score of four out of five in a clear provocation to the working class.

On the question of education, Garcetti has fully lined up behind the policy of current mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. That is, the continued attack against public education and accelerated implementation of charter schools.

Furthermore, in a radio debate broadcast in early May, both candidates pledged to install more police officers on high school campuses, continue firing so-called low performing public school teachers and expressed regret that the district did not apply for the latest round of Obama's Race to the Top program which would have cut more teachers amongst other educational "reforms."

In spite of these commitments, the United Teachers of Los Angeles lent its full support to Garcetti's campaign. "We look forward to working with Eric Garcetti as mayor," said UTLA President Warren Fletcher. "He listens to teachers. He understands the importance of our expertise and our commitment to educating students."

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