

ISO lines up behind Democrats in New York mayoral election

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On November 5 it is all but certain that a Democratic Party mayor will be elected in New York City for the first time in nearly 25 years. Candidate Bill de Blasio has a lead in the polls of more than 40 points over his Republican rival, Joseph Lhota.

No doubt de Blasio's commanding margin in part reflects popular disgust with social conditions and the attacks on the living standards of the working class, especially over the past 12 years under New York's billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg. De Blasio's triumph in the September 10 primary election followed a campaign in which he feigned outrage over inequality in New York and attacked Bloomberg at every turn.

It would be quite wrong to exaggerate the enthusiasm for de Blasio among voters, however. Barely 20 percent of registered Democrats went to the polls in the primary election, and millions ignore the primary contests for good reason. Among the workers who struggle to meet housing and health care costs and other basic needs, there is little enthusiasm for any of the big business politicians.

The real significance of the air of inevitability that hangs over the election of de Blasio as the next mayor is the coalition of support for this supposed "left-wing" candidate. It stretches from what remains of the Democratic Party machine, to the trade unions enrolling hundreds of thousands of city workers, to many of the billionaires who would have preferred to see Bloomberg remain in office forever but are more than satisfied that their interests will be well taken care of under the Democrat. They are beginning to see the advantage of having a Democrat in City Hall who is able to negotiate a new round of drastic attacks on pensions and health care with the union apparatus.

De Blasio has spent the last six weeks reassuring Wall Street that, despite his occasional rhetoric in the primary campaign, it has absolutely nothing to fear from his taking the reins at City Hall. He recently addressed a group of plutocrats, including Lloyd Blankfein of Goldman Sachs and Rupert Murdoch, the owner of both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Post*, at the headquarters of Viacom. De Blasio pledged allegiance to what he termed the city's "hometown industry."

While the cynical Democratic Party and trade union operatives sing the praises of de Blasio as a crusader for the poor and the working class, the corporate elite has donated well over a million dollars to him in recent weeks. On Monday night former Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for whom de Blasio was campaign manager in her 2000 Senate campaign, hosted her own

fundraiser for de Blasio that raised more than \$1 million.

It is the task of socialists to expose the role of de Blasio and his party, fighting to prepare workers for the struggles they will face no matter who occupies the mayor's office, and above all explaining the need for a class break from the parties of big business.

The International Socialist Organization, however, has a very different aim, as demonstrated in its assessments of the mayoral contest in its publication, *Socialist Worker*. "The Bloomberg backlash," an article by Danny Katch posted a few weeks ago on socialistworker.org, exposes these pseudo-lefts, who are neither internationalist nor socialist, as supporters of the same candidate who is backed by the billionaires.

Well over half of the socialistworker.org article is devoted to a celebration of de Blasio's primary victory. They toss him one compliment after another. He ran "the most effective television ad of the race" (the one starring his teenaged son).

"De Blasio's rhetoric around race and policing is also a dramatic improvement from past Democratic mayoral candidates," the ISO gushes.

It goes on in this vein. It seems that, while a City Council member, "de Blasio helped to pass some progressive legislation defending the rights of tenants, immigrants and transgendered people."

And it celebrates the fact that he "got himself arrested in a protest to keep two Brooklyn hospitals open...So for a change, a Democratic candidate actually did something to earn a union endorsement." In point of fact, the arrest was a campaign stunt, carefully calibrated by the de Blasio campaign to secure an edge over his Democratic rivals.

Only at the end of Katch's account do we finally read of some "skepticism" about de Blasio. The use of this term is itself revealing. The ISO's criticisms are couched "more in sorrow than in anger." "Skeptical" means one is open to being convinced, to being proven wrong. In other words, the ISO is arguing, not that the Democratic Party and all of its candidates are the proven instruments of the ruling class, but that perhaps de Blasio will not be up to the task of making good on his promises.

"...even if we accept de Blasio's recent left turn at face value," Katch writes, "his current platform—while better than the thin broth offered up by his rivals—is not all that substantial."

Even more significantly, the ISO "warns" about upcoming negotiations between the city and the unions representing

municipal workers (they have been working for up to four years without contracts) in the following terms: “The city elites are united in calling for municipal workers to make major concessions in their health care and pension funds. *Which means that whatever his inner intentions, de Blasio will find himself under immense pressure to carry out the ruling class offensive.*” [Emphasis Added]

Even as de Blasio makes the rounds of corporate boardrooms and hobnobs with Murdoch, Blankfein and the rest, the ISO is trying to supply him an alibi in advance. His “inner intentions” were the best, but he basically had no choice. The ISO functions as the left flank of the Democrats and works to “keep hope alive” in this party of big business that is so discredited that it has failed to win a New York mayoral election since 1989.

Wildly exaggerating the “hopes” in de Blasio, the ISO article concludes, “For those of us who are skeptical about de Blasio, our role should not be to dash these hopes (as if we could), but to try to channel them into the grassroots movements for change...that have helped to create this political moment.

“We can try to convince our co-workers and fellow activists not to campaign for de Blasio, but instead demand that *he* campaign for us....” In other words, direct workers wherever possible into the filthy swamp of the Democratic Party and away from the road of independent political struggle.

This orientation to the Democrats is reiterated in a more recent comment on socialistworker.org, one that tries to cover its tracks just a bit with a few more criticisms of de Blasio. The author of this article, Don Lash, is described as having “a lot of doubts” about the candidate.

The comment couches its complaints in terms of the likelihood of de Blasio betraying his great promises. One of the main issues raised by Lash is the possibility that the Democratic mayor will bring back William Bratton as police commissioner to replace Raymond Kelly—as if de Blasio’s problem is that he is spurning a genuinely “progressive” alternative to head the police department.

This article sums up its argument in terms that are even clearer than the earlier piece: “No one should wait for de Blasio to lead New York into a post-Bloomberg era,” the ISO declares. “We have to begin organizing now to build the pressure for change that no politician can ignore.”

Liberal protest politics and pressure on the Democrats—that is what the ISO proudly stands for. This is in opposition to the building of a new revolutionary leadership, one that fights to organize workers in struggle against the profit system and all of its representatives, one that seeks the socialist reorganization of economic life, not “pressure for change that no politician can ignore.”

The ISO’s orientation is not to the working class at all. The “fellow activists” it refers to in fact comprise sections of the affluent middle class, those involved in various forms of identity politics, along with the upper echelons of the trade union bureaucracy.

This orientation is revealed when Katch explains, in reference to the collapse in the polls of the former front-runner Christine Quinn, the City Council Speaker. “Quinn’s descent might have been further fueled by the sexism that so often greets women

running for high office, including in the more liberal of the two major parties,” he writes. “Apparently, it’s too much to expect male candidates like de Blasio and Bill Thompson to urge voters to reject such ugly sentiments...”

In fact, Quinn has been a close backer of Bloomberg, supplying crucial support for a change in the law that allowed him to run for a third term. The ISO’s search for “sexism” as a contributory factor in Quinn’s loss shows how distant these pseudo-lefts are from the working class.

The orientation is also made plain, earlier in Katch’s article, by the astonishing statement that “Bloomberg’s political success has rested on his ability to convince most New Yorkers of two things...that the philosophy of enriching the already rich...is the only realistic path for cities if they want to avoid becoming the next Detroit...and that this business model would not only benefit the wealthy, but lead to better performance in city services...”

What is he talking about? Bloomberg didn’t convince most New Yorkers of anything—certainly not most workers! He spent hundreds of millions of dollars of his own vast fortune to buy three elections, and he rested overwhelmingly on the support of the wealthy and the upper middle class, who vote disproportionately in the two-party shell game that is the essence of the election process. And of course Bloomberg’s not-so-secret weapon was the treachery and bankruptcy of his supposed Democratic opponents, who could not present any alternative to his policies.

What these references to Bloomberg make clear is that the ISO is addressing itself to some of these same layers, certainly those in the gentrified parts of Brooklyn and lower Manhattan, where they do much of their political work in New York.

The ISO’s class orientation and political program are inseparably connected. Its enthusiasm for de Blasio, a Democratic hack and Clinton loyalist, goes hand in hand with its backhanded support for Obama, its total identification with the most backward forms of identity politics, and its support for “democratic” imperialism in Syria and elsewhere.



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