

Bill Clinton administers oath of office to New York's new mayor, Bill de Blasio

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Bill de Blasio took the oath of office just after midnight on New Year's Day, becoming the first Democratic Party politician in the New York City mayor's office in 20 years. The ceremonial and high-profile swearing in took place some hours later on the steps of City Hall, and the oath was then administered, in a move that had unmistakable political significance, by former president Bill Clinton.

The City Hall event, attended by a crowd of 5,000 that included numerous celebrities, was touted as the dawn of a new "progressive" era in New York and throughout the US.

De Blasio chose his words carefully in his inaugural remarks. The speech was advertised as a refusal on the part of the incoming mayor to back away from the "populist" rhetoric of his campaign. "When I said we would take dead aim at the Tale of Two Cities, I mean it," said de Blasio. Borrowing the phrase associated with the Occupy Wall Street protests of two years ago, he added, "New Yorkers see our city not as the exclusive domain of the One Percent, but a place where everyday people can afford to live, work and raise a family."

At the same time the new chief executive of New York made it very clear that his aim was to save and defend the profit system, not to fight against it. "We are called to put an end to economic and social inequalities that threaten to unravel the city we love," he said. "We do not ask more of the wealthy to punish success. We do it to create more success stories."

The reference to "inequalities" signals the new mayor's aim: not to put an end to the fundamental social inequality that characterizes New York, with the world's largest concentration of billionaires and millions of working poor, but to pay lip service to "progressivism" and "social justice" with the aim of staving off a social upheaval that could "unravel the city."

As for not punishing the wealthy, this was an allusion to

de Blasio's supposedly daring plan for higher taxes to fund pre-kindergarten classes, a plan that is widely expected to face opposition in the state capital and which would amount to less than \$1,000 for those with incomes of up to \$1 million.

The new mayor's resumé says everything that workers need to know about his outlook and his political training. He served in the Dinkins administration and then went to work for Clinton during his two terms in office in the 1990s, when "ending welfare as we know it" and similar measures marked the intensified assault on the living standards and social conditions of the working class.

This was the decade in which the inequality that de Blasio is supposedly so angry about grew at its fastest rate in a century. This was when the repeal of the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act, with Clinton's vigorous support, laid the basis for the criminal banking activities of the first decade of the 20th century. The new mayor of New York never publicly opposed any of these measures.

After his service at the federal level, de Blasio went on to manage Hillary Clinton's 2000 Senate campaign. This was followed by stints on the City Council and as New York City's Public Advocate, before his run for the mayoralty last year.

De Blasio's appointments have, without exception, been designed to reassure Wall Street. Last month he announced the choice of William Bratton as the new police chief, along with Anthony Shorris as the first deputy mayor. Bratton served under Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the 1990s and was a key architect of policies that would soon become known as "stop and frisk." Shorris served both the Koch administrations in the 1980s and Bloomberg 20 years later. The selection of veterans of earlier administrations conveyed an unmistakable message of continuity with previous attacks on the working class.

Now the new mayor has followed up with a number of

other key choices. Carmen Farina, the new schools chancellor, has opposed standardized testing and the rapid expansion of charter schools, but de Blasio emphasized that changes in education policies would be mainly ones of tone. Zachary Carter, former US attorney for the Eastern District of New York, will be the city's new corporation counsel.

Several other appointments illustrated the theme of continuity. These included Gilbert Taylor, deputy commissioner at the Administration for Children's Services under Bloomberg, who will become commissioner for homeless services under de Blasio; and Kyle Kimball, who will remain as the president of the New York City Economic Development Corporation.

Most significant of all, de Blasio appointed two veterans of the Koch years of the 1980s to take on the task of negotiating new contracts covering 300,000 municipal workers, most of whom have been working without new agreements for between two and four years.

"This may be the hardest assignment that anyone in the history of labor relations in this city has taken on," said de Blasio in announcing the choice of Robert Linn as director of labor relations and Stanley Brezenoff as an unpaid advisor to assist Linn. Linn had served as Koch's chief labor negotiator, and Brezenoff held a number of posts, including deputy mayor. This was a period noted for Koch's crude attacks on public sector workers, most infamously his rants against transit workers when they went on strike in 1980.

The aim of these appointments is clear. De Blasio seeks to make municipal employees and other workers pay for the economic crisis by enlisting the collaboration of the trade unions in imposing new attacks. These will likely include pension and health care cutbacks and the establishment of two-tier systems that attack new workers and lay the basis for a low-wage and low-benefits work force. The pseudo-lefts, from the *Nation* magazine to the likes of the International Socialist Organization, will find a way to apologize for these measures.

It is in this context that the appearance of Bill and Hillary Clinton at the inauguration and their wholehearted support for the new mayor must be understood. "I wanted not to say much except (administer) the oath," said Clinton, as reported on the Politico web site. "But I have to say I strongly endorse Bill de Blasio's core campaign commitment to shared opportunities ... and this inequality problem bedevils the entire country ... We cannot go forward if we don't do it together."

Clinton is the architect of "triangulation"—in which the

Democratic president openly adopted the policies of the Republicans and even more directly subordinated the government's policies to the immediate requirements of corporate and finance capital, all the while proclaiming that he could "feel your pain." His embrace of de Blasio represents the recognition that the new mayor will pursue much the same policy in order to defend the interests of Wall Street.

Wide sections of the ruling elite are increasingly worried, five years after the financial crash of 2008, about the consequences of social polarization and the worsening conditions of the working class. Richard Ravitch, another veteran big business spokesman who previously headed the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York and has spent decades shuttling between government and the corporate world, gave an interview to the *New York Times* this past Sunday in which he warned that "the pressures on New York City are going to be enormous" and that the current levels of inequality are "going to lead to some degree of social unrest."

De Blasio speaks for these layers of the ruling class. In the weeks before his election victory, his campaign was flooded with hundreds of thousands of dollars of donations from Wall Street and other big business sources. They recognized that social discontent in New York had reached the point where some gestures were required, precisely in order to continue to make the working class pay for the crisis of capitalism.

Millions of workers will see in the coming months and years that only new attacks on their living standards and basic rights can be expected from de Blasio or any other section of the Democratic Party, and that what is critically needed is a break with the parties of big business and the independent mobilization of the working class to fight for socialism.



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