

New York's “progressive” mayor de Blasio continues right-wing policies

Fred Mazelis
3 February 2014

As Bill de Blasio finished his first month in office as the first Democratic mayor of New York City in 20 years, liberal pundits have been hailing recent pronouncements from City Hall as the onset of a new age of reform.

Even a brief look at the smattering of initiatives announced by the new mayor in recent weeks, however, shows that de Blasio's “reforms” add up to more of the same as far as the working class in the financial capital of the US is concerned.

First came the announcement that the new administration was introducing a bill in the City Council to mandate at least five paid sick days a year to be provided by companies with at least five or more workers, an improvement over a law set to take effect in April that would apply to firms with 20 or more employees.

This exceedingly modest proposal was followed by the report that the new mayor is promising 200,000 units of affordable housing over the next ten years, including renovation of existing apartments as well as new ones.

De Blasio also made a trip to the state capital of Albany on January 27 to lobby the legislature for approval of a tiny tax increase on the wealthy to fund pre-kindergarten programs. Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo claims he can fund pre-school programs without the tax hike.

The proposals of the mayor—who ran on “tale of two cities” rhetoric—will do nothing to ameliorate the yawning social inequality that permeates every aspect of life in New York City.

The affordable housing target, for instance, compares to 165,000 affordable units during former mayor Michael Bloomberg's 12 years in office. During that same period there was actually a net loss of 60,000 rent-

regulated apartments in the city, largely because of turnover of existing units. Even de Blasio said a few months ago that the city was “in many ways treading water,” an understatement when one considers the real state of affairs, dominated by the proliferation of super-luxury high rises and the fact that many apartments labeled as “affordable” are beyond the means of millions who work in low-wage service jobs.

The political controversy over the mayor's and governor's competing methods of financing pre-kindergarten programs obscures the fact that, even were such programs implemented, 5- and 6-year-olds who went on to the city's elementary and high schools would find a school system starved for funds and undermined by the push for profit-making charter schools and high-stakes testing.

The real aim of the media-fueled public relations campaign surrounding de Blasio's proposals is to build up the “progressive” credentials of the mayor in preparation for more open attacks on city employees and every section of the working class. De Blasio's legislative plans are not merely inadequate, they are a cover designed to pave the way for an escalation of the assault on wages and benefits.

The *New York Times* has been setting the pace as far as big business backing for de Blasio. An editorial last week in this leading organ of American capitalism patted him on the back, praising his proposal for paid sick leave and de Blasio's “unabashedly liberal agenda in areas like jobs, health care and housing.” Earlier the *Times* had headlined its story on the sick leave proposal “Leaders Begin City's Left Turn...”

De Blasio is clearly the kind of liberal the *Times* can embrace. His agenda is aimed at defending the profit system by keeping the working class chained to the Democratic Party and utilizing the services of the trade

union apparatus in imposing deeper austerity.

A particularly revealing episode was the appearance of this supposedly liberal mayor at last month's meeting in New York of the notorious American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the right-wing Zionist lobby to which every Democrat pledges allegiance. De Blasio reported that he had visited Israel three times, and boasted of his "solidarity" with the Zionist state and its decades-long occupation of the West Bank. "City Hall will always be open to AIPAC," he said. "When you need me to stand by you in Washington or anywhere, I will answer the call and I'll answer it happily 'cause that's my job."

Behind the scenes, while the de Blasio administration professes concern for the poor and advances toothless legislation, it is getting down to the real business at hand, ensuring that city workers pay for the economic crisis.

With hundreds of thousands of public employees, including teachers, transit workers and many others, having worked for as long as four years without contracts, the new Democratic administration is preparing to veto anything approaching decent wages, benefits and the huge amounts in back pay that workers are owed after many years of a de facto wage freeze.

Whether or not secret negotiations have started in earnest, it is certain that the unions, thoroughly integrated into the administration, will be arguing that city workers must make their own sacrifices to ensure the success of their friend in City Hall. This will likely take the form of attacks on pensions and health care, with the establishment of two-tier systems of pay and benefits.

While the unions are de Blasio's full partners—his hand-picked candidate to become City Council president, Melissa Mark-Viverito, was a long-time official of Hospital Workers Local 1199 before she became a council member—he also can count on the indirect assistance of pseudo-left organizations like the International Socialist Organization.

The ISO tries to camouflage its role in the guise of criticism of the failings of de Blasio, but the message is always spelled out, as in the latest article by Danny Katch on socialistworker.org, "Who's stopping him anyway?"

Katch once again devotes about half of his article to presenting de Blasio in the best possible light. After

noting that, in his view, the attitude of most New Yorkers is "let's give him a chance," Katch adds, "the true stirrings of impatience with de Blasio are coming from the city's ruling class..."

Every word in this passage is a lie or a distortion. The attitude of most workers in this city, who did not bother to even vote in the election last November, is that all of the big business politicians, including de Blasio, are worth nothing. De Blasio, moreover, is not the victim of some vendetta on the part of the city's ruling class; he is a representative of this class, having been elected with substantial funding from Wall Street and the major real estate developers. While no doubt there are some hedge fund billionaires who are livid at the possibility of paying a few hundred dollars more in taxes, de Blasio has the support of most of the establishment, who see the need for a tactical maneuver.

By magnifying the outbursts of Tea Party backers, Katch and the ISO try to generate support for their real agenda: channeling the growing anger of workers and young people back into the swamp of Democratic Party politics and providing a "left" cover for the attacks being prepared by City Hall and its union allies.

"De Blasio was elected mayor of New York City on a promise to reduce inequality," writes Katch, "but you can't reduce inequality without taking on the 1 Percent, which he is loathe [sic] to do." The issue is not some reluctance on de Blasio's part to fight on behalf of the working class. If he is only "loath" to fight, then he can be convinced to fight, and that is exactly what Katch proposes. "Activists in the movements for racial and economic justice," the ISO spokesman writes, "need to push de Blasio to meet our demands now."

The social demands of the broad masses of working people in New York cannot be met by "pushing" de Blasio anywhere. What is required is an uncompromising and single-minded struggle for the long-overdue break from the Democratic Party and the building of a mass independent movement of the working class to fight for a socialist reorganization of society.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact