

New York Mayor de Blasio's mantle of "progressivism" wears thin

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More than 30 urban mayors from across the US met last week at Gracie Mansion, the official residence of New York City's Mayor Bill de Blasio, where they pledged themselves to the fight against inequality.

De Blasio is the chairman of a task force on income inequality that was formed last June by the United States Conference of Mayors. The task force commissioned a report that revealed, not for the first time, that the gulf between rich and poor had steadily grown over the past 40 years and continues to do so in the age of Obama. The richest fifth of US households control 51 percent of wealth, up from 43.6 percent in 1975, while the poorest fifth has seen its portion drop from an already abysmal 4.3 percent to 3.2 percent during this period.

De Blasio and his advisers have sought to claim the mantle of "progressivism" within the Democratic Party. They point to his big electoral victory last November, and claim that he will inaugurate a new period of liberal reform. Each passing month since he took office on January 1, however, has further vindicated the insistence of the Socialist Equality Party that there is no progressive wing of this party of Wall Street.

Nearly a year ago, when de Blasio won the Democratic Party primary for the upcoming election, the WSWP explained that de Blasio, while "warn[ing] that a change in political tactics is required lest a social explosion take place...like all his fellow Democrats, will work day and night to channel the growing discontent back into support for the same party that is leading the attacks on the working class through the Obama administration."

As media accounts of the Gracie Mansion meeting made clear, the assembled mayors pledged essentially nothing. They hailed the handful of crumbs so far announced or enacted by the de Blasio administration: a woefully inadequate pre-kindergarten program whose details have yet to be elaborated, and a partial and limited mandate that firms grant paid sick leave to their employees.

New York City's working people—immigrants, city employees, the unemployed and the youth—have seen no

fundamental improvement in their conditions of life since the Democrats regained City Hall for the first time in 20 years. The toll of joblessness, low wage employment, the housing crisis and the rising costs of education and health care are leading to the kind of social tensions that erupted with the police chokehold murder of Eric Garner on Staten Island several weeks ago.

New York may be the capital of inequality in the US, but it is far from unique. Among de Blasio's fellow "progressives" gathered at Gracie Mansion last week are some, like Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel and Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter, who have not deemed it necessary to employ the "left" phrases used by de Blasio in his mayoral campaign last year. The various "centrist" Democrats have no hesitation in associating themselves with the New York Mayor, however; there are no significant differences among them.

These big business politicians represent the corporate and financial establishment, and will do nothing to provide jobs at decent pay or the resources necessary for child care for working parents or a genuine quality public education for all. This is not only or even primarily a matter of intention. The profit system defended by every Democrat and Republican can no longer afford even the smallest social reform.

The gulf between de Blasio's claim of progressivism and the reality of inequality in New York is made even clearer by the juxtaposition of the Gracie Mansion affair and the ongoing crisis following the chokehold death of Eric Garner.

The mayor quickly dropped any hint of radical rhetoric in order to defend his police commissioner William Bratton and the notorious "broken windows" policy of policing pioneered by Bratton in his first stint as New York's top cop more than 20 years ago. Addressing the police claim that Garner was illegally selling single cigarettes when he was accosted and killed, de Blasio told a news conference that, "a violation of the law is a violation of the law."

At the Gracie Mansion meeting de Blasio once again stressed his allegiance to American capitalism. His main

theme was to sound the alarm to the ruling class about the revolutionary implications of deepening poverty. He blamed “the Reagan revolution of the ‘80s, amplified later by Newt Gingrich,” for the neglect of the cities. “We can’t let an inequality crisis overcome us,” de Blasio warned. “Because if it isn’t addressed, it will undermine the stability of the country.”

The deaths of Eric Garner in New York and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri have focused attention on what could rapidly become a widespread social explosion. De Blasio is working to restore “stability” and cover up the class issues. On August 20 he went to a meeting of religious and political leaders hosted by New York’s Cardinal Timothy Dolan, and attended both by Police Commissioner Bratton and Al Sharpton, who has become one of the main instruments through which African-Americans are kept within the orbit of Democratic Party big business politics.

Sections of the media establishment have noted with concern the growing difficulties facing de Blasio as he seeks to keep the lid on rising social discontent, the job that he was “hired” for by the ruling elite. Hence the front-page article in the *New York Times* this week, seeking to defend the mayor against charges that he has forgotten his campaign promises.

The *Times* article, headlined “City Hall Memo,” trots out the usual excuses, paragraph after paragraph. De Blasio “is discovering that liberalism has its limits.” He “is deeply concerned about disappointing his supporters.” The current tensions “reveal the growing pains of a mayor who must answer to a much larger public...” The mayor’s “resources are finite.” The point of all of this is to counsel patience among the *Times*’ liberal readers, to let them know that “disappointment” is inevitable, and at the same time to make it clear that they must stick with the Democrats. The *Times* editors are not very worried about the well-off liberals, but the prospect of a political break by the working class with this party of big business fills them with dread.

Meanwhile, from the “left” side of the bourgeois political spectrum comes another voice, in this case supposedly advocating some impatience instead of patience, but with exactly the same goal in mind: channeling the growing anger back into the Democratic Party and preventing a class break with the party of de Blasio, Obama, Clinton and the rest.

An article by Danny Katch on socialistworker.org, the website of the International Socialist Organization, entitled “The de Blasio balance sheet,” serves this purpose. We have had occasion to discuss Mr. Katch and his crude cover-up for de Blasio at the time of last year’s election. Eight months into de Blasio’s term, of course, he has learned nothing. Katch opens his article by reiterating how charmed he was with de Blasio and his campaign. “It was

refreshing,” he writes, “to see an unabashedly liberal campaign succeed so decisively in a city that likes to think of itself as progressive but had elected Republican mayors for the past 20 years.”

After his “refreshing” beginning Katch goes even further into his typical posture of groveling appeals to the Democrats. He lists a series of “disappointments” with the mayor. Everything is couched in terms of regret or “disappointment.” There is no passion or class feeling, of course. As a loyal member of the pseudo-left fraternity Katch cannot find it in himself to indict de Blasio for his role. He writes, for instance, that “it’s far too early to make an assessment of some of de Blasio’s initiatives,” particularly his affordable housing plans. His reaction to the rotten deal brokered by de Blasio to give Governor Andrew Cuomo the Working Families Party ballot line on the ballot is that “it is premature...to declare that de Blasio and the Working Families Party have succeeded in shifting the state Democratic Party to the left.” This is his verdict on the filthy maneuver by the union-financed WFP.

To call Katch’s comments mealy-mouthed is not to do them justice. Finally Katch reaches the end of his piece and spells out his message. “Occupy Wall Street...brought the issue of economic inequality to the forefront of national consciousness...Bill de Blasio was one of the first politicians to recognize that changed consciousness...” And finally: “Those who supported the new mayor don’t need to wait two and a half more years to start holding his feet to the fire.”

In other words, the struggle to “save” the Democratic Party has only just begun. The principled and long overdue battle to successfully establish the political independence of the American working class, to break from this party of big business and begin the struggle for a socialist program, is opposed by the likes of Katch. Speaking for privileged sections of the middle class, the pseudo-lefts, along with their allies in the trade unions, are among the main props of this party of imperialist war criminals and Wall Street bankers.



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