

New York City mayor de Blasio virtually unopposed for reelection

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There is little doubt of the outcome of the mayoral election in New York City on November 7. Incumbent Democrat Bill de Blasio, who campaigned four years ago as a crusader against inequality and proceeded to govern just as every capitalist politician had before him, faces only token opposition from two right-wing Republicans and a former Democratic City Councilman, Sal Albanese.

The latest of the pre-election polls puts de Blasio at 44 percentage points ahead of Staten Island assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis, the official Republican candidate, who runs a far distant second. It is no surprise that a candidate who supported Donald Trump would not find a receptive audience in New York, with its large African-American, Hispanic and immigrant population. More significant is the fact that voter turnout in November is expected to fall below the already abysmal level of 26 percent of those eligible who cast ballots when de Blasio was first elected in 2013.

The first of two debates took place on October 10. It featured, in addition to the mayor, Malliotakis and ex-police detective Bo Dietl, who is running as an independent. Democrat Sal Albanese was not included, on the dubious premise that he had not spent enough money on his campaign. Albanese, however, has absolutely no serious differences with de Blasio.

The televised encounter was even more devoid of serious political discussion than usual. Malliotakis reminded the audience that de Blasio had campaigned on the slogan of “a tale of two cities” four years ago. The Republican understandably dropped this line of argument very quickly, however. She and her party have no alternative to growing social polarization, unless it is to accelerate it even further and more rapidly.

Dietl has generally tried to imitate the loudmouthed demagoguery of the current occupant of the White House, even though he now claims that he has discovered that Trump is a “lying narcissist.” Dietl’s antics at the debate included reminding listeners that de Blasio was a fan of the Boston Red Sox baseball team.

De Blasio was perfectly content with this sideshow, using his right-wing opponents as a foil to divert attention from his rotten record as a representative of Wall Street and the real estate developers. One particularly noteworthy moment in the debate came when, in response to the claim that crime was rising in some areas, de Blasio said this argument (incorrect, as it happens) had to be opposed because it was “denigrating the hard work” of the police department. More than three years after the police murder of Eric Garner on Staten Island, and in the wake of continuing police abuse and violence in New York and elsewhere, the “progressive” Democrat is eager to wrap himself around the representatives of law and order.

There have been many signs of dissatisfaction with de Blasio within the tiny layer of the ruling elite that places its names on cultural institutions and generally seeks to dictate personnel as well as policy in the financial and cultural capital of the United States. In the end, however, there was no alternative for the ruling class, and de Blasio was judged acceptable, even if not as well-regarded as his predecessor, billionaire Michael Bloomberg. The economic and political establishment is also wracked by unprecedented factional warfare in the wake of Trump’s ascent to the presidency. Hence no serious opponent was groomed to oppose the incumbent.

At the same time, within the working class, illusions in de Blasio, fairly modest even four years ago, have mostly disappeared. The general dissatisfaction and

disgust with the whole political set-up can find no other expression than abstention, under conditions in which the trade unions and the general middle class “left” milieu work to maintain the grip of the Democrats.

While de Blasio’s reelection may thus be all but certain, it is sure to be followed by a deepening of the attacks that have continued over the past four years.

On the crucial issue of affordable housing, conditions continue to worsen. The latest population figures in city shelters is a record 60,051, including many families with children. The count for those living on the streets, nearly 4,000, is undoubtedly far below the actual numbers. De Blasio, like every representative of big business, seeks to govern as a manager of homelessness. The mayor promises to reduce the homeless population over the next five years by a total of 2,500 people, a figure so tiny in comparison to the crisis as to sound like a cruel joke. He also proposes to build dozens of new homeless shelters in neighborhoods around the city.

De Blasio advances what has been euphemistically described as a “multipronged approach” to the housing crisis. It involves very little new housing. Instead, the mayor pushes deals with developers of luxury housing to offer a few “affordable” apartments inside of their high-rise towers; renovation of apartments and buildings around the city, in cooperation with private developers and nonprofit housing groups; and the “preservation” of affordable units, by such measures as arrangements that keep rents below the currently astronomical market rates.

The mayor’s promise of 200,000 affordable units over a decade, even if accomplished, would mean almost nothing under conditions in which currently affordable apartments are still being lost because landlords are able to legally increase rents to market levels when they become vacant. As one housing advocate was recently quoted in an article in the *New York Times*, even if de Blasio meets his goal of “affordable” apartments, “Will the city be more affordable? And a lot of communities are not convinced of that.”

Housing is only one important element in the continuing social crisis that affects millions of working class New Yorkers, even as Wall Street hits new records week after week and major sections of the city are the scene of “hypergentrification,” with high-rise

luxury building and artificial neighborhoods for the affluent upper-middle class sprouting up as the latest expression of what was first given the label of “conspicuous consumption” more than a century ago.

The issues of housing and education are bound up above all with that of jobs at decent wages. Even at the goal of a \$15 minimum wage, families will live in or near poverty. Recently released figures show that the poverty rate, and the percentage of the “very poor,” were basically unchanged between 2010 and 2015. These years span the supposed “recovery” from the financial crash of 2008. The pattern of prosperity for the upper 10 percent of income levels and struggle and suffering for the rest has continued since then. As *New York Times* reporter Sam Roberts acknowledged in a recent column, in what is undoubtedly a conservative estimate, the city “probably has more poor people today than when the mayor was inaugurated.”

Also looming over a second term for de Blasio is the extraordinary bubble of financial speculation that finds expression in the ultra-luxury housing boom and every other aspect of life in the city. The question that must be posed about the current speculative expansion is not whether, but when it will come crashing down. As de Blasio prepares for election to a second term, New York City stands on the brink of an economic and social catastrophe.



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