

Democrat Bottoms wins Atlanta mayoralty after recount

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Following a December 14 recount in the contentious Atlanta mayoral runoff, Keisha Lance Bottoms, the candidate of the Democratic Party establishment, was officially declared the winner over Mary Norwood, an independent. Both candidates are elected members of the city council and have a record of backing numerous pro-business and anti-working-class measures.

It is far from clear whether this certification, with a prominent dissent from the vice-chairman of the Fulton County election board, will settle the matter or whether the election results will get embroiled in drawn-out legal battle.

The recount occurred at the official request of Norwood, after the first certified results a few days earlier resulted in a vote difference of less than 1 percent in favor of Bottoms. Although the recount hardly changed the vote tally, Norwood is reportedly considering challenging the results in the Georgia Supreme Court, contending that residents of certain city neighbourhoods recently annexed into the city were ineligible to vote and that about 1,000 provisional and absentee ballots were not hand-counted during the recount.

The election was characterized by a debased and thoroughly reactionary campaign from both candidates, with racial identity being constantly injected as an underlying theme by the Democratic Party and the corporate media. Bottoms, who is black, and Norwood, who is white, constantly accused each other of being corrupt, with Norwood promoting herself as an “outsider” who would clean up the city hall. Currently the city is under corruption investigations by the US Justice Department, the FBI and the IRS criminal division.

Norwood and Bottoms moved to the runoff elections after receiving the two highest percentage of votes in

the first round held in early November.

This result also mirrors the outcome of the previous, equally vitriolic mayoral election in 2009, when Norwood faced off against Kasim Reed, who won the first of his two terms as mayor. That election was also decided by a narrow margin of 714 votes, prompting Norwood to charge earlier this year that Reed only won by busing in ineligible voters to cast ballots for him.

The current election was marked by low voter turnout of less than 29 percent of registered voters. The final official vote count showed Bottoms receiving 46,661 votes, or 50.4 percent, as against Norwood, who received 45,840 votes, or 49.6 percent. The low turnout reflects the gulf separating the capitalist politicians from the city’s working class, who are rightly convinced that it makes no difference to their lives which of these pro-business politicians becomes the Atlanta mayor.

The media and the Democratic Party establishment attempted to make race the main focus, since Norwood would have been the first white mayor of Atlanta since Maynard Jackson in 1973 began a string of 11 consecutive terms for black mayors. This effort had limited success, as Norwood received a significant number of votes from African-Americans.

Norwood and Bottoms have far more in common as ruling class politicians than the superficial difference in their skin color. Both believe that the city administration exists first and foremost to make the city attractive to businesses by giving tax breaks and other sops, and for economic development through “public-private partnerships.”

This orientation is only the flip-side of their anti-working-class outlook, as they and 13 other city-council colleagues united to pass “pension-reform” legislation last year, a sweeping attack on the earned

pensions of past, current and future city workers. This “reform” steeply increased, from 7 percent of pay to 13 percent, the amount current city employees will have to pay to retain their existing pension benefits. New employees, especially ones in the lower pay scale, will be placed into a hybrid plan composed of both a reduced traditional pension and a 401(k)-type plan.

For close to four and a half decades, a corrupt group of Democratic Party politicians has exercised its “leadership” over the city hall, firmly institutionalizing crass corruption and cronyism. As mayor, Bottoms is sure to mirror the record of her predecessors, all of whom created a corrupt nexus between businesses and the city hall while cracking down on the city’s poor and homeless.

Moving past the first round, Bottoms quickly garnered the support of the national black Democratic Party establishment. Her long list of endorsements included the current mayor, Kasim Reed; former Atlanta mayor and US Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young; and US Senators Kamala Harris of California and Cory Booker of New Jersey.

However, at the local level there was a split among Democrats. Norwood gained the endorsement of prominent black politicians, including the former Democratic Mayor Shirley Franklin. She was also endorsed by the Atlanta Police Benevolent Association, which claimed to be speaking for about 1,200 city police officers.

In the course of the campaign, the Democratic Party establishment mounted attack advertisements accusing Norwood of being a closet Republican and a Trump supporter. Harris and Booker, both touted as potential presidential candidates in 2020, flew into Atlanta just prior to the runoff elections to stump for Bottoms.

Maynard Jackson, who held the mayoralty for 12 years altogether, became known for institutionalizing the cozy relationship between downtown business interests and the black Democratic Party machine, with his “set-aside” programs which reserved 25 percent of airport expansion contracts to minority businesses. By late 1970s the number of city contracts handed over to minority-owned businesses created numerous black multimillionaires. They in turn became the political “base” for the increasingly corrupt Democratic Party establishment.

Bill Campbell, perhaps the most corrupt of the lot, or

at least the one who got caught, privatized the city water supply, which eventually led to sky-high water rates and a decrepit water and sewage system. This move was such a disaster that city was compelled to kick out the private company United Water, a subsidiary of the French Suez corporation, and take back its administration.

Bottoms typifies the grasping, reactionary black petty-bourgeoisie with an oversized opinion of themselves. In claiming the mayoralty, she asked young black women to emulate her with these words: “I want every young Black girl to know that Black girl magic is real.”

On her website, Bottoms describes herself as “a compassionate leader and committed public servant.” It does not take long to discover the limits of this compassion. She boasts about having “authored the toughest Panhandling legislation in the history of the city,” which hands out the city’s desperate, poor and homeless prison sentences for begging or even for simply being on the city streets.

In addition to her leading role in attacking pensions of city employees, Bottoms also highlights her leadership in helping “to achieve the goal of 2,000 [up from the current 1,200] officers within the Atlanta Police force, and to successfully balance the City’s budget each year during her time on Council, without increasing taxes.”

Under Mayor Reed and his predecessors, there has been a sustained push to gentrify old and poor neighbourhoods in partnership with speculators. The constant renewal of Atlanta airport contracts are another lucrative source of enrichment for businesses connected to the mayor’s office. Both the close ties to business interests and cost-cutting at the expense of city employees are sure to continue and even intensify under the new mayor.



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