

Prospective candidates jockey for position in 2021 New York City mayoral election

Fred Mazelis**1 February 2021**

The primary election to choose the Democratic candidate for mayor of the largest city in the United States is less than five months away, and two dozen candidates have already announced their hope to succeed New York's "progressive" mayor Bill de Blasio, who is barred by term limits from running to reelection. The Democrat chosen on June 22 is expected to easily defeat the Republican candidate in the November general election, given the huge Democratic lead in voter affiliation.

De Blasio is term-limited, but even if that were not the case, he would be unlikely to try for a third term in office. Workers see him as no different from any of his predecessors, and he is all the more despised because of his lying promises about tackling inequality when he first ran in 2013. Left-talking capitalist politicians routinely make pledges they have no intention of keeping, but rarely has this time-honored custom been so brazenly displayed as by de Blasio.

While he has done nothing to antagonize Wall Street during his seven years in office, de Blasio has clearly outlived his usefulness as a means of keeping popular discontent contained within the two-party system. His administration has become something of a laughingstock, paralyzed in the face of the greatest social, economic and health crisis in generations.

The city's official unemployment rate is more than 12 percent, which is more than double the national figure, although both numbers are gross undercounts of joblessness and social misery. More than 26,000 New Yorkers have so far died from COVID-19, and the total number of cases is close to 600,000, about 7 percent of the city's population.

Three hundred thousand people have left the city, including a disproportionate number of the affluent. New York faces a budget deficit of \$4.84 billion for the next fiscal year, while the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, whose jurisdiction includes the city's buses and subways, faces its own deficit of \$6.3 billion in the current year. The city's retail, hotel, restaurant, entertainment and tourism economic sectors have all been devastated by the

coronavirus pandemic. The homeless population, which has grown during the pandemic, is estimated by the Bowery Mission at 80,000, or nearly 1 out of every 100 residents.

In the face of this crisis, unprecedented in living memory and in some ways worse than that of the Great Depression, all of the Democratic aspirants for City Hall are conducting themselves as if not much has changed. All, without exception (even including veterans of the de Blasio administration) have distanced themselves from the current mayor, but politics and program are nowhere discussed. None of them call for a coordinated attack on the pandemic, including the shutdown of all non-essential workplaces and full income compensation for workers during the course of the crisis.

The leading candidates, at least in terms of how much money they have raised and how much attention this has brought them in the big business media, include Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, current City Comptroller Scott Stringer, Andrew Yang, a 2020 candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, and former Citigroup executive Raymond McGuire.

Adams served in the New York Transit Police and the New York City Police Department for over 20 years, and during the 1990s he was the president of the Guardians Association, an organization of African-American police officers. Together with Stringer, Adams leads the so-called "money race," having raised a total of \$8.6 million thus far.

Stringer, the city's chief fiscal officer, has raised \$8.3 million. He is the only city-wide elected official among the current candidates, although not necessarily favored to win. The comptroller has tried to position himself during the years of the de Blasio mayoralty as an "independent" critic of the mayor, but his record is that of a reliable defender of the capitalist status quo. When he announced his candidacy last September, Stringer somewhat boldly harked back to de Blasio's original campaign slogan, saying, "We never closed the book on a tale of two cities. If anything over the last eight years, we've written new chapters." Of course, Stringer had nothing to say about proposed remedies, much

less his own responsibility.

Andrew Yang officially joined the race only two weeks ago, trading on his celebrity status from the presidential campaign. A lawyer and businessman, he attempted to distinguish himself from other presidential candidates with the radical-sounding proposal for a universal basic income of \$1,000 a month. Yang has been endorsed by comedian Whoopi Goldberg and Martin Luther King III, among others.

Perhaps the most noteworthy among the current candidates is also the least known to the voting public. Raymond McGuire retired from Citigroup last year to explore a mayoral race. He is reported to have raised a total of \$5 million in the last three months, putting him close to those who announced their campaigns long before. Unlike the other candidates, the retired banker is not participating in the city's somewhat complicated matching fund program, and is thus free to raise unlimited sums from the super-rich. The city's program, falsely claiming to eliminate the role of big money in politics, distributes public funds to those who meet the criteria of at least \$250,000 raised from at least 1,000 donors, and also abide by a spending cap, which is currently \$7.3 million.

McGuire and his backers have concluded that he is better off outside this program. According to a recent report in the *New York Times*, at least 20 billionaires have donated generously to his campaign. These include hedge fund founder John Griffin, former Starbucks chief executive Howard Schultz, and Home Depot chairman and major Trump supporter (at least until the January 6 attempted coup at the Capitol) Kenneth Langone. Other donors are Kara Ross, the wife of realtor and Trump fundraiser Steven Ross, Madison Square Garden president James L. Dolan, and Richard Fuld, the last chief executive of Lehman Brothers before it went bankrupt in the 2008 financial crash.

McGuire has the particular advantage, to the ruling class, of being African American. The oligarchs would very much like someone in the mold of billionaire Michael Bloomberg, whose three terms lasted from 2002 through 2013. But in line with what has become virtual dogma within the Democratic Party, racial politics is considered indispensable. The candidacy of McGuire combines these two elements—the more or less direct rule of Wall Street, packaged in the language of identity politics. One of McGuire's most ardent supporters is filmmaker Spike Lee, who produced the video announcing his candidacy. Another donor and supporter is Valerie Jarrett, the former adviser and longtime confidant of Barack Obama.

Soon after he announced his candidacy, McGuire also received an indirect endorsement from Richard Ravitch, another figure who looms large in the history of both the

business establishment and New York politics. The 87-year-old power broker, whose wealth comes from his family's real estate business, has filled key appointed roles in city and state government, including a stint as head of the MTA during the bitter 1980 New York transit strike.

The mayoral aspirants also include three women who are veterans of the de Blasio administration. They are Maya Wiley, who served as the mayor's counsel; Loree Sutton, who headed the Department of Veterans' Services; and Kathryn Garcia, who was Sanitation Commissioner. All three have left the administration. Neither they nor any of the other candidates are seeking the current mayor's endorsement, and most have said they would refuse it if offered. Significantly, none of these candidates have accused de Blasio of betraying his promises by kowtowing to big business. Their criticisms instead accuse him of mismanagement, lack of initiative and similar sins.

The period leading up to the June primary and beyond will see thousands more COVID-19 deaths in New York City and millions around the world. It will also take place amid economic devastation overwhelmingly targeting the working class, its most oppressed layers in particular.

Workers are also stirring in response to the economic and political crisis, however, as evidenced by the strike of produce workers at the Hunts Point terminal, and the ongoing resistance of teachers and other education workers to de Blasio's efforts to reopen the school system. The most conscious response comes from the workers who have begun to form independent rank-and-file committees to fight for safety and against economic devastation during the pandemic.

The Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in America, long dominant in New York City, regards any independent action by the working class with utmost hostility, while relying on the unions, like the United Federation of Teachers and the Transport Workers Union, to suppress workers' struggles and chain workers to big business politics.

In the maneuvers leading up to the mayoral election, the class role of the Democratic Party will become clearer to the workers of New York City, who must begin to draw political conclusions about the need to build a revolutionary socialist alternative to the entire rotten framework of capitalism and the two-party system.



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