

Eric Adams takes office as Mayor of New York City, pledging to keep schools open amidst record COVID-19 infections

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Eric Adams took the oath of office as the 110th mayor of the largest city of the United States at a ceremony on January 1, just after the annual Times Square countdown ushering in the New Year. The new mayor lost no time in emphasizing his loyalty to Wall Street, pledging that the city's public schools would remain open despite the unprecedented wave of COVID-19 infection spawned by the Omicron variant.

Interviewed on ABC television a day after assuming office, Adams told parents of small children to "fear not sending them back. The stats are clear. The safest place for children is inside a school." This as child hospitalizations have surged to record levels, the city reported nearly 40,000 new cases in a single day.

While professing concern for the obstacles facing young people confined to remote learning, Adams laid heaviest stress on the child care problems facing parents. He thus revealed the primary reason for the drive to keep the schools open: to keep the parents at their jobs and the city's business establishment satisfied.

The former Brooklyn borough president is the city's second African American mayor. He began his career as a Republican in the 1990s and spent 22 years in the police department. "New York is back," he exclaimed demagogically after taking the oath. A day later he declared that the pandemic "insults our very nature as New Yorkers" and that the city "can and should be the center of the universe again."

Adams has been greeted warmly by the financial and political establishment, including the corporate media, big names on Wall Street and trade union operatives. Dominant sections of the ruling class approve of Adams' combination of identity politics with

subservience to the rich.

He ran as a "moderate," using pseudo-lefts like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as a foil. He pointed to the uptick in gun violence in the city to run on a law-and-order platform and secure the endorsement of Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post*.

The city's massive working class majority was not impressed. Adams narrowly won the Democratic primary last June, and the voter turnout on Election Day in November was 23 percent. This was a record low and even three percentage points lower than the figures for the 2013 and 2017 elections won by Bill de Blasio. Even though he won the general election by a large margin, Adams won office with the support of only 15 percent of eligible voters.

The new mayor's priorities are clearly reflected in his major appointments. David Banks, an old friend of Adams and the founder and head of an all-boys network of public schools, the Eagle Academy for Young Men, will be the new Schools Chancellor. While the Eagle schools are part of the public school system, they also have some characteristics of privately-run and publicly-funded charter schools. While not officially segregated, they are focused on an Afro-centric approach. Both Banks and Adams have supported charters, which have been used to undermine public education in major cities around the country.

Adams was expected to name Philip Banks, the brother of the new Schools Chancellor, to the post of deputy mayor for public safety, but the appointment has been delayed and possibly scuttled in amid questions surrounding Banks' retirement from his top post in the police department in 2014. Corruption allegations surfaced but were later dropped.

For the new police commissioner, Adams has, as promised, chosen a woman. The appointee is Keechant Sewell, who had been chief of detectives in neighboring Nassau County. Sewell is also African American and grew up in the Queensbridge housing project, in the borough of Queens.

The new mayor has stressed his police background while also claiming that he is the first working class mayor of New York. He has spelled out his law-and-order program on several fronts. First, he is bringing back the plainclothes anti-crime unit in the police department that was disbanded in 2020 and was notorious for abuse, particularly of young black men.

The names of the victims of plainclothes detectives are well known in New York and beyond. Among them are Amadou Diallo in 1999, Sean Bell in 2006 and Eric Garner in 2014. Adams, who has made much of his opposition to the slogan of “defund the police,” claims that he will deploy the units to get guns off the street and achieve both “justice” and “public safety.” The actual role of the NYPD exposes the fraud of this claim.

Another proposal is the return of solitary confinement in the city’s jails, which Adams proposes to call “punitive segregation.” The name change cannot disguise the nature of this shift. When some members of the City Council raised objections, however, Adams’ reply was extremely significant: “I wore a bulletproof vest for 22 years and protected the people of this city. And when you do that, then you have the right to question me on safety and public safety matters.”

This is language that can and will be used to erect a virtual mini-police state. It was echoed, in almost identical language, by the notorious longtime fascistic head of the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association in New York, Patrick Lynch. After the appointment of Sewell was announced, Lynch issued a statement declaring, “We welcome Chief Sewell to the second-toughest policing job in America. The toughest, of course, is being an NYPD cop on the street.”

There is also a sinister parallel between Adams’ claim that New York “should be the center of the universe again” and the slogan of Donald Trump, “Make America Great Again.” New York was the center of the universe for the super-rich and their upper middle class hangers-on. It was never that paradise for

the working class and less so than ever during the first two decades of the 21st century. Adams, as a Democratic stooge of the ruling class, is pledging to do his all to defend their power and wealth.

He comes to office amidst a growing mood of anger and opposition in the working class in response to the surge of the Omicron variant. The pandemic is a prime cause of the city’s persistently high rate of unemployment, now officially at 9.4 percent. This is double the current national rate, but it does not count the vast numbers of workers and youth who have left their jobs because of the pandemic or who have stopped looking for work.

The city’s homelessness epidemic continues at record levels, and it includes an estimated 100,000 homeless school-age children. The city’s hospitals, already exhausted after nearly two years of the pandemic, are in danger of collapse in the face of the Omicron variant, while the city’s multimillionaires and billionaires have added to their mountains of wealth.

The trade unions are an inseparable part of the Democratic hierarchy now presided over by Adams. Among his biggest trade union backers are Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, both of which endorsed him before the June primary. What have the workers these organizations claim to represent received in return? The transit workers have been particularly hard hit by COVID-19, and many hotel workers have seen their jobs completely disappear.

The stage is set for enormous struggles. What is underscored is the urgency of the fight for the political independence of the working class, breaking from the unions and the Democrats, and establishing rank-and-file committees to lead the fight against COVID-19 and all the attacks on jobs, social services and living standards.



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