

New York City Mayor Eric Adams's first three months: Operating as a ruthless law-and-order frontman for big business

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In his first three months in office, New York City Mayor Eric Adams has made little effort to disguise his priorities. In a city that is a global capital of social inequality and is still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, the African American Democrat Adams offers law-and-order crackdowns reminiscent of former Republican Mayor Rudy Giuliani, along with a ruthless defense of Wall Street and all of big business.

A few weeks ago Adams invited a dozen business leaders to Gracie Mansion, the mayor's official residence. Among those in attendance, according to the report in the *New York Times*, were Goldman Sachs chief executive David Solomon and Jonathan Gray of Blackstone, the giant private equity firm with assets of more than \$26 billion.

Much has been made of the new mayor's "swagger" and self-confidence. The *Times* story gave a more accurate picture of how decisions are made in the city that, according to *Forbes* magazine, is home to 99 billionaires. "On March 10," it reported, "Mr. Adams released a 59-page 'blueprint' for the city's recovery that focused on reducing gun violence, removing homeless people from the subway and making outdoor dining permanent—reflecting the guidance of business leaders."

There was no mention of decent jobs, affordable housing or universal health care, nothing about the ongoing pandemic or about the looming wave of evictions and utility shutoffs, in short, nothing that will impinge on the power and privileges of the super-rich who have already made a killing during the last two years, while 40,000 New Yorkers have been killed by COVID-19. Adams takes his "guidance" from the bankers and other sections of the corporate elite.

The mayor's role as a cheerleader for the financial aristocracy was also highlighted by a report in the *New York Post* of his appearance at a swanky party last Monday night. He partied with celebrities like model Cara Delevingne and hip-hop artist A\$AP Rocky during an event in a high-rise office tower near the city's Grand Central Terminal. The occasion was the promotion of a new credit card being issued by Wells Fargo, one of the country's biggest banks, that can be used for rent payments.

"So everyone who moved to Florida, get your butts back to New York City because New York City is where you want to be," Adams boasted from the stage. At the very moment he was addressing himself to wealthy city residents who had moved away

during the pandemic, he was deploying police and sanitation department workers to clear some of the city's many homeless encampments. The connection is more than coincidental. Adams is telling the wealthy that he will protect their interests and keep the homeless out of sight and the working class under control.

The new mayor has taken his approach to the pandemic from those ultra-right politicians who have denounced the wearing of face masks as an infringement on "freedom."

"The return to normalcy is about substantive things we have to do and symbolic things," Adams told the *Times*. "As much as we say things are normal, the face mask is a symbol that things are not. It's time to see our faces again, particularly our children."

This statement comes as coronavirus cases have risen significantly in the last few weeks and amid predictions that the BA.2 subvariant, which already constitutes about 30 percent of cases in the city, is poised to hit hard in the coming weeks. While Adams was criticizing masks, the city's subways and buses continue to prominently feature posters reminding riders that they are legally required!

Law and order is the other main plank in the new administration's platform. The mayor is promoting a revival, in an "improved" version, of the notorious "broken windows" policing launched by Giuliani in the 1990s. This focus on so-called quality-of-life issues like public drinking led directly to the stop-and-frisk tactics that were later found unconstitutional but not before many tens of thousands of workers and youth, disproportionately minority or immigrant, had been jailed at such hellholes as Rikers Island.

As part of his revamped "broken windows" policy, Adams has launched new Neighborhood Safety Teams within the New York Police Department. Similar plainclothes units were involved in the brutalization of working class communities, including police killings. They were finally disbanded in 2020, but Adams is bringing them back, supposedly to get guns off the streets. The teams will be made up of five cops each, deployed in 30 police precincts which have seen the highest number of illegal guns. The officers will go through a seven-day training course. They will wear modified police uniforms but will still ride in unmarked cars.

The mayor coupled the announcement of the new police units with threats against bystanders who have used their cell phones to record instances of police misconduct and brutality. "Stop being

on top of my police officers while they're carrying out their jobs," Adams told a news conference, as reported in *New York* magazine. "That is not acceptable, and it won't be tolerated. That is a very dangerous environment that you are creating when you are on top of that officer, who has an understanding of what he's doing at the time, yelling 'police brutality,' yelling at the officer, calling them names."

The reference to "my police officers" is significant. Adams let slip the fact that the police are not there to "protect and serve" the general population. They answer to the ruling class and its political establishment, and whatever the pledges of reform and good behavior, their job is to keep the working class in its place.

In such cases as that of Eric Garner in New York in 2014 and of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, two of the most infamous police killings in recent years, cell phone video was crucial in documenting the events and led directly to the prosecution and the rare guilty verdicts that were returned in Minnesota. So great was the outcry at the murder of Floyd, across the US and internationally, that the New York City Council passed a bill to protect the recording of police by civilians. The new mayor, a black man who spent more than 20 years in the police department, wants to turn this law into a dead letter. The city's police unions, notorious for their support of brutality, have expressed their appreciation of Adams's words and his actions.

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) reacted immediately to the mayor's recent comments. "Historically, these units have been involved in excessive force at rates that are disproportionate to the rest of the department," said Michael Sisitzky, senior policy counsel at the NYCLU, as reported by *Politico*. "They've racked up higher rates of misconduct allegations and they've been involved in some of the most notorious killings of New Yorkers."

"It's all the more critical that the public know they do have the right under the First Amendment, and under New York City and New York state law, to document and expose police misconduct," Sisitzky continued. "This kind of message coming from the administration seems clearly designed to discourage New Yorkers from engaging in their constitutional right to hold police accountable."

Adams is the second black mayor in the history of New York City, the first being David Dinkins, elected in 1989 for one term. It is noteworthy that he is being compared, not with Dinkins, but with the Republican Mayor Giuliani, who was elected in 1994. State Assemblywoman Latrice Walker, representing a district in Brooklyn, commented, in reference to Adams's law-and-order campaign, "I feel like I'm in a time warp ... like it's 1994, and Rudy Giuliani is the mayor."

Giuliani, who became well-known for his right-wing demagoguery and defense of police brutality that led to such atrocities as the torture of Abner Louima in 1997 and the murder of Amadou Diallo in 1999, has since gone on to become a lawyer and chief advocate for former President Donald Trump. An architect of the lie of the stolen election of 2020, he has been stripped of his license to practice law in New York State.

That Adams and Giuliani could be mentioned in the same sentence testifies to the utterly right-wing character of the

Democratic Party and also to the way in which the Democrats, representing key elements within the ruling elite, have utilized racial identity politics.

When he ran for mayor last year, Adams was seen almost as a "dream candidate" by sections of the corporate elite. By virtue of his working class background and his skin color, he was judged almost immune to criticism by the so-called "left," which is heavily invested in identity politics, and for that reason far more reluctant to question policies pursued by a minority politician. The fact that Adams did not always stress his race was an additional plus. Here was the perfect frontman for austerity and law and order. The support he received from Wall Street signaled its recognition that major class battles are ahead.

With Adams in City Hall, almost every major office in New York City and the state, with the exception of Governor Kathy Hochul, is now held by an African American. These include, in addition to Adams, Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin, State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, New York City Schools Chancellor David Banks, and New York City Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell.

The racial and ethnic background of these politicians and public officials has made and will make absolutely no difference for any section of the working class, black, white, Hispanic or immigrant. What is important is not their skin color but the class they represent, and they all represent capitalism, not the working class.

The unemployment rate in New York continues to run at double the national US figure. Millions live in privation and misery alongside a level of wealth never seen before. Employment growth is almost entirely confined to the "gig" economy and low wage jobs, while new waves of COVID-19, for which the city is unprepared, are virtually guaranteed. This objective crisis and the class struggle are decisive, not the grand schemes of the establishment and its political representatives. What is urgently needed is to arm the working class with the socialist program it needs for the struggles ahead.



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