

“Left” Democrats make gains in Washington D.C. primary

Dmitri Church
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The Democratic Party primary elections in Washington D.C. last month saw a number of nominally left candidates win out over their more conservative rivals. Matthew Frumin won the Democratic primary in Ward 3, Zachary Parker in Ward 5, and Brianne Nadeau (the incumbent) in Ward 1.

In the heavily Democratic city, the primary winners are usually all but guaranteed to win the general election. The three “left” Democratic council members-elect join at-large Democratic Councilwoman Janeese Lewis George, a self-avowed democratic socialist and supporter of the Black Lives Matter organization, on the council. This brings the number of “left” and even nominally “socialist” seats on the council to four out of 15, forming a significant bloc on the District legislature.

Parker was publicly endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America, who pointed to his support for expanding rent control and tenant protections, as well as “community safety efforts” as opposed to simply expanding the police budget. In a public statement, the Washington D.C. chapter of the DSA proclaimed Parker’s candidacy a “massive opportunity for the progressive left to elect an uncompromising champion for our values.”

The statement further declared, “Metro D.C. DSA’s endorsements are not just a recommendation to DSA members to vote for a particular candidate, but rather a commitment to fight to get that candidate elected.”

Frumin and Nadeau, while not officially supported by the DSA, were endorsed by a number of labor unions and other “progressive” groups. A statement on the Washington D.C. DSA’s blog states, “[o]n the whole, District voters opted to boost left, progressive candidates over moderate alternatives” in the June 21

primaries.

Frumin, a former State Department official in the Clinton administration, has also advocated for affordable housing in the District and declared himself a proponent of public education. These positions no doubt gained traction with workers throughout the District of Columbia (D.C.) who are facing the same cost-of-living increases as workers the world over. Rents in the district have increased over 23 percent since May 2021, and the average studio apartment rents for a staggering \$1,924; two-bedroom apartments are going for over \$3,000.

Frumin was able to clinch his victory a week ahead of the election, when three other Ward 3 candidates dropped out of the race, endorsing him over his main rival, former D.C. Council staffer Eric Goulet. According to the *Washington Post*, Ben Bergmann, one of Frumin’s rivals, denounced Goulet as “a conservative yes-man for the business community” as he dropped out of the race.

Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser won her primary but with a far less comfortable lead than her previous victory in 2018. This time she faced a serious challenge from Robert White Jr., who garnered 40 percent of the vote. White had campaigned to Bowser’s left, criticizing the incumbent’s pro-police, law-and-order policies.

The left rhetoric of the candidates provoked the ire of the *Post*. The latter chided District residents in an editorial statement a week before the primary. “The District has been blessed with sober, stable leadership, but voters should remember it was not that long ago that its government was in dysfunction and its finances in disarray. It would be a mistake to return to those days,” the newspaper said.

The editorial board revealed the nature of its concerns

in another statement published just after the election. “In addition to the rise in gun violence ... the District is still reeling from the effects of the pandemic. How to bring back downtown? How to make up for student learning loss?” In other words, the *Post* is demanding measures be taken to get workers producing more profits and give the police the power to quell any resistance.

In the same statement the *Post* breathed a sigh of relief that Bowser won her primary and will likely be reelected to a third term in November. However, the publication was nervous that an “extreme left” council would make it harder for Bowser to “attain her goals.”

The *Post* revealed something of the undemocratic state of bourgeois politics, saying Bowser “will need to recalibrate her ‘my way or the highway’ approach if she hopes to continue to move the city forward.”

Despite this in-fighting, no one should be under the illusion that any of the new council members will do anything of substance to help workers in the city. Parker’s supposed “left” pretensions are thrown into question by his open support of the right-wing Biden administration.

In a tweet from August 2020, the “democratic socialist” stated “we should all be proud” that the Democratic Party had made Joe Biden and Kamala Harris its “standard-bearers.”

A deeper look at his platform substantiates this. Under his “Cooperatives, Community Wealth, and Small Business Development Platform,” Parker advocates racially based tax credits and other incentives for small businesses. His approach to “Worker Power” is to implement a local version of the PRO Act, a national Democratic Party initiative aimed at strengthening the corporate-backed unions and other measures to limit the class struggle to the confines set by the bourgeois state.

Matthew Frumin, despite the fulminations of the *Post*, is a similar case. In his campaign website’s page on “Public Safety,” despite invoking the murder of George Floyd and claiming that we should not “double down” on old policies, lists as its first priority to grow the police force, followed by increasing recruitment and training of officers. The rest of his platform contains measures that claim to change the “culture of police” and other empty promises which commit him to nothing concrete.

Frumin was endorsed by Janeese Lewis George, Ward 4 council member, who was herself endorsed by Black Lives Matter and the DSA. George maintains a reputation of being critical of the police, but this is belied by her actual record on the council. This includes her open support for Bowser’s recent pick for police chief, Robert J. Contee III. Contee, a longtime official in the Metropolitan Police Department, last year came into public view when he denounced politicians who want to “coddle violent criminals.”



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