

Karen Bass sworn in as Los Angeles mayor, plans crackdown on homeless

Dan Conway
12 December 2022

Karen Bass, an outgoing member of the US House of Representatives from California, was sworn in as mayor of Los Angeles Sunday, replacing outgoing mayor Eric Garcetti. The event itself was a gala affair completely out of proportion to the actual public support for the new Democratic mayor which is virtually nonexistent.

Bass, in fact, won the mayoral election mostly by default. Her opponent, billionaire real estate developer Rick Caruso, was widely hated not only as an embodiment of obscene wealth and privilege in one of the most unequal cities in the country, but also for his opposition to abortion rights, especially in the wake of the US Supreme Court *Dobbs* decision ripping away abortion rights at the federal level.

Vice President Kamala Harris flew in to Los Angeles to personally administer the oath of office to Bass on Sunday while a celebration in the new mayor's honor was held at the Microsoft Theater near City Hall with a performance by musician Stevie Wonder and a reading by the young, bromide-spouting celebrity poet Amanda Gorman. Harris' husband Doug Emhoff also attended the event with several other US congressional members.

Acknowledging the vice president's presence in her inaugural address, Bass stated, "Know that your city has your back."

The presence of Harris is significant as it represents another attempt by the ruling elite to utilize crass upper-middle class identity politics as a means to distract from the essentially right-wing character of the new administration. Bass, like Harris before her, is being celebrated as the first woman and black woman to hold her office and the "transformational" character of her new administration is being widely celebrated by a compliant and servile media apparatus. Her actual

record, though, like Harris, is that of an established law-and-order candidate for high office, resisting all calls to rein in police brutality and promising brutal repression against the poor and working class instead.

Bass has promised to sharply increase the size of the Los Angeles Police Department and when recently asked to respond to the popular call to "defund the police" which emerged during the mass protests over the 2020 police murder of George Floyd, called it "one of the worst slogans ever."

Instrumental in pushing through budget cuts at the state level during the financial crisis of 2008/2009 when she was speaker of the California Assembly, Bass is now turning her attention towards addressing the critical homelessness crisis in Los Angeles.

The new mayor called for a "fundamental shift" in how the city addresses the issues of policing and homelessness. "It also takes a fundamental shift," she said, "away from 'no, that's not my problem' and to 'how can we work together, to get to a yes?'"

The very next day, her first as mayor, Bass declared a state of emergency to deal with the homeless issue. Bass promised to house 15,000 of the city's homeless population of nearly 70,000 during her first year in office. She promised that the city would put more resources into trained "neighborhood service teams" to connect people with housing and mental health services and that she would use her contacts with the Biden administration to obtain federal housing vouchers along with federal waivers for the constructions of mental health and substance abuse facilities. This is a bleak prospect indeed considering the Biden administration's prioritization of funding for the war in Ukraine and preparations for wider war against Russia and China.

While Bass lamented the desperate housing situation of Los Angeles residents, "Today, too many Angelenos

have no choice but to crowd multiple families into one home, and to work multiple jobs just to barely pay rent,” no mention was made of the predatory landlords and banks who have made fortunes out of skyrocketing and unaffordable rents and are themselves in large part responsible for the rise in homelessness. Housing costs in Los Angeles are among the most expensive in the nation with an average apartment rental of \$2,734 per month.

In fact, the new mayor’s proposals to address homelessness are in reality tailored towards the interests of real estate developers. The waiving of regulations and expedited approval processes Bass is also proposing will result in massive profits for real estate owners and associated financial interests. Building owners will be obliged to set aside only a tiny portion of building space at best to house the poor. The remaining homeless will be subjected to a mass police crackdown being planned by the new administration.

Despite the happy face the ruling elite is trying to put on the new mayoral administration, the city of Los Angeles is in fact wracked by an immense social crisis and is poised to explode.

One day before the new mayor’s swearing in and two days before new city councilmembers also took their seats on Monday, city councilman Kevin De León was filmed in a physical altercation with a protester at a Christmas tree lighting event.

De León was one of three council members caught on tape at a private meeting in 2021 along with Los Angeles County AFL-CIO head Ron Herrera making racist and disparaging remarks regarding other city officials and constituents. The other two council members, Gil Cedillo and council president Nury Martinez, have since resigned their posts while De León himself has stubbornly refused to do so. The leaked audio, taken during a private meeting held at AFL-CIO Los Angeles headquarters to discuss redistricting, revealed Martinez referring to a fellow council member Mike Bonin’s adopted black son as a “changuito” or “little monkey” with De León in turn referring to the same boy as an accessory like a handbag.

The Christmas tree lighting occurred only one day after De León appeared at a city council meeting for the first time since the audio was leaked two months ago. Immediately after De León took his seat at the Friday

meeting, protesters began shouting at De León and his supporters with three other council members immediately exiting the council chambers. Police officers inserted themselves between council members. The council then went into recess as it lost quorum and De León did not return once the council reconvened later that day.

While the political fate of De León has yet to be determined, there is every indication now that the city administration, in concert with the Biden administration, has had enough of protesters and is making increasingly clear that it will be impervious to their pleas. Far from disciplining De León, the city government is intent to instead punish the audiotape leakers for bringing the conversation to public attention, with the LAPD launching an investigation into the leak last month and serving warrants as part of the investigation in late November as well.

One outgoing city councilmember, Paul Koretz, used his last appearance with the council to express his attitude towards protesters, saying, “So I would just say lastly, to the disrupters and protesters who have done their best to make it difficult for us to do our work in the last two and a half years, in their words: I yield the rest of my time. F—you.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact