

Right-winger wins Philadelphia Democratic mayoral primary on law and order platform, pseudo-left candidate comes in third

Landon Gourov, Douglas Lyons
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The most expensive Democratic mayoral primary in the history of Philadelphia, the sixth largest city in the United States, took place on May 16. A total of nine candidates campaigned for the party's nomination to run in the November general election, expected to be a shoo-in for the Democratic candidate.

The city has been run by Democrats for the last 70 years, amid deindustrialization, soaring inequality and growing working class restiveness. Philadelphia is one of the poorest cities in the nation, with a third of its children living in poverty.

The candidates in the primary comprised the typical assortment of rich, business-owning millionaires, career politicians and fake "left" candidates, such as Helen Gym. The latter was endorsed by Senator Bernie Sanders, and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member and House of Representatives Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC).

In a very tight race, according to polls, Cherelle Parker, a former state representative and current city councilwoman, secured a larger than expected victory, winning by a margin of 10 percent. She ran on a right-wing, pro-business, law-and-order platform, calling for the hiring of more police officers, an increase in police funding and the institutionalization of the unconstitutional stop-and-frisk policing tactic.

Police have repeatedly terrorized and killed workers and young people in Philadelphia. Last year, police officers executed an unarmed 12-year-old boy lying face-down on the pavement. In a more recent case, a landlord's private police officer shot a tenant in the head.

Parker will face off against Republican David Oh, a member of the Philadelphia City Council. Oh is an

attorney and former member of the Army National Guard. He has little chance of beating his opponent in a city where registered Democrats significantly outnumber Republicans.

Political pundits have compared Parker to the current mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, who also ran on a right-wing, pro-police program and is himself a former police officer. Parker, for her part, embraced the comparison, refusing to distance herself from Adams or his right-wing politics.

A survey conducted by Lake Research Partners and Vera Action found that an overwhelming majority of Philadelphians reject this pro-police agenda. The survey stated:

In yet another major-city municipal election where crime and public safety dominated the issue agenda, voters once again showed an understanding of these issues far more complex and nuanced than the political discourse and conventional wisdom would have suggested. 72 percent of voters prefer an approach to safety that focuses on preventing crime and addressing its root causes. In fact, fewer than one-quarter of all respondents (22 percent) prefer "tough on crime" policies.

The election underscored the fact that none of the pressing social issues impacting the working class, such as good-paying jobs and health care, affordable housing, the eradication of COVID, safe schools and high-quality education, will be resolved within the two-

party capitalist system. This includes the supposed “progressives” in the Democratic party.

In the lead-up to Election Day, Gym racked up endorsements from Sanders, AOC, a DSA youth group, newly elected “progressive” mayors in Chicago and Boston, and a list of Hollywood celebrities.

Despite the support of such high-profile figures, Gym managed to garner only 22 percent of the vote, placing her third behind Rebecca Rhynhart, a former Wall Street executive and city controller. While touted as a “progressive” and fighter for the people, Gym’s platform failed to distance her from her more right-wing competitors in the Democratic Party.

The endorsements by Sanders and AOC—both of whom have fully supported Democratic President Joe Biden’s increase in military spending and the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, as well as the ending of all restraints on the COVID pandemic—did little to increase the enthusiasm of voters for Gym. Less than 30 percent of registered Democrats cast a ballot in the primary.

In spite of Gym’s bluster in the past about capitalism, including denouncing it as “an immoral system,” she never uttered the word at her final election rally. Nor did Sanders or AOC, who shared the stage with Gym.

In the end, her empty rhetoric did not attract large numbers of working class voters, who are increasingly alienated from both big business parties.

A former teacher, Gym portrayed herself as an implacable fighter for public education, determined to fix the public schools in Philadelphia, which have seen teachers and students poisoned with asbestos and lead-tainted water, as well as a tragic toll in infections and deaths from COVID. At the same time, she said she was willing to work with proponents of charter schools on the city’s Board of Education.

Gym was backed by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), led by Jerry Jordan, who supported her education plan, saying it was “thoughtful and [had] proactive measures to address a real crisis in our city.” Jordan was responsible for sending teachers back into unsafe classrooms at the height of the Omicron surge in 2022, while rank-and-file teachers fought for remote learning to save lives. The endorsement of Jordan and the PFT fell on deaf ears, revealing the deep alienation of the rank and file from the trade union bureaucracy and Democratic politicians.



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