

# Trade union bureaucrats and pseudo-left groups celebrate NDP stalwart Olivia Chow's election as Toronto mayor

Carl Bronski  
13 July 2023

Olivia Chow, who was elected Toronto mayor in last month's special election, was sworn into office on Wednesday July 12, at a ceremony meant to highlight her purported "progressive" credentials.

At the ceremony, Chow urged business and "labour," i.e., the union bureaucracy, to join with her in bringing about "change" and "renewal." In reality, her administration will impose still more austerity on a city plagued by mounting social crisis and fraying infrastructure. She has already signaled that she will call the city council back from summer recess for an emergency meeting in August to discuss the growing fiscal crisis that confronts Canada's most populous city.

Chow is a stalwart of the union-sponsored New Democratic Party—a right-wing, pro-big business party that is propping up the federal Liberal government as it wages war alongside its NATO partners against Russia, massively increases military spending and imposes "post-pandemic" austerity and inflation-driven real wage cuts on working people.

It has been estimated that the city's current budgetary deficit has now reached \$1.5 billion. With provincial law forbidding municipalities from running a deficit, Chow will soon set the stage for a program of relentless cuts to social services combined with municipal wage restraint and increased fees, levies and residential property taxes.

Supporters of Chow from the trade union bureaucracy and Canada's pseudo-left fraternity compare their "progressive" coalition with that cobbled together by former Mayor David Miller, who ran the city from 2003 to 2010. Such has been the headlong hurtle to the right of these self-avowed "left" forces that Miller's administration—which quietly lavished tax breaks on big business, rationed social services, increased rates and fees affecting working families and spearheaded a 2009 attack on city workers' supposed "overly generous" benefits—is now the imprimatur for "progressive" municipal politics.

Chow is following in Miller's footsteps. During her campaign, Chow repeatedly refused to provide details on residential property tax hikes for next year except to contradictorily say they would be "modest" but could still be above the rate of inflation. In an attempt to allay the legitimate fears of working class home owners already struggling with increasing mortgage rates and to dubiously burnish her "progressive" image, Chow promised a "luxury home tax" and an expanded land transfer tax on homes sold for more than \$3 million, supposedly targeting the richest of the rich. But even if these measures are adopted by City Council, they will in fact represent nothing more than the equivalent of a small "rounding error" in the overall budget.

Sections of the union bureaucracy and pseudo-left have hailed Chow's victory. Proponents of identity politics have celebrated it as the election of Toronto's first "racialized mayor." Others push the ridiculous claim that Chow will "make the rich pay." Judy Rebick, a one-time Pabloite and founder of the social-democratic website "Rabble," described Chow's victory as a "win for the left." Spring Magazine, the split-off from the mis-named International Socialists, praised Chow's imminent ascension to power as a "left opening."

Among the most enthusiastic boosters was Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) leader Laura Walton, who has just announced her candidacy for Ontario Federation of Labour president. Walton gained the enmity of tens of thousands of Ontario workers last November when she played a leading role in scuttling a powerful strike by 55,000 education workers in defiance of a draconian strike ban by the hard-right Ford government.

For their own part, CUPE Ontario, the province's largest public sector union, wrote, "Olivia Chow, her campaign and her politics represent a new direction. Despite the array of power lined up against her, she built a huge, progressive movement. In their hundreds of thousands, people responded to her messages of possibility and change, and to her

rejection of austerity for austerity's sake."

CUPE's statement is particularly slippery. Chow will frame her attacks on the living standards of working people in Toronto, not as "austerity for austerity's sake," but as the "responsible" thing to do.

As far as the dubious claim of Chow "building a huge, progressive movement" is concerned, she won the mayoralty with only 37.2 percent of the votes cast in a miserable overall election turnout of just 38 percent of eligible voters. Voter turnout in the city's most impoverished neighbourhoods remained largely unchanged. Once the arithmetic is done, Chow's city-wide support amounted to roughly 14 percent of the total eligible electorate.

Perhaps the most significant message dispensed from those who cast a ballot was their decisive rejection of the media-promoted candidates of the hard- and far-right, who advocated strident anti-worker labour and authoritarian law-and-order platforms, while vowing to eviscerate social spending. Conservative Ontario Premier Doug Ford's preferred candidate, former Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders, registered a paltry 8.5 percent support. Far-right tabloid columnist Anthony Furey and City Councillor Brad Bradford gleaned 4.9 and 1.2 percent respectively.

Federal Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he was "really excited" to work with the new mayor as a "strong progressive partner." However, he was quick to add that Chow could not depend on the federal government to bail the city out of its budgetary crisis. Already, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, busy with funnelling monies to escalate the NATO proxy war in Ukraine, has curtly dismissed Toronto city councillors' pleas to honour Trudeau's reneged 2021 election promise to provide hundreds of millions to the city in additional COVID relief.

Hard-right Ontario Premier Doug Ford, jettisoning his bombastic election rhetoric, assured reporters that Chow was a "nice person" with whom he can "find common ground." In response, Chow said she could "absolutely work" with Ford, an erstwhile Donald Trump enthusiast and one of the most right-wing premiers in Ontario history.

Ford's government is currently awaiting the results of an outside audit into Toronto city finances prior to committing to any bailout funds. Conservative government officials, who have enthusiastically slashed provincial social services over the past five years, are urging further cuts in the Toronto budget before dispensing financial assistance. Responding to this, Chow told reporters, "My experience is that the city's budget we cut to the bone, but never say never. If savings can be found, I'm glad to take the advice."

During the mayoral campaign, Chow made the construction of 25,000 units of affordable housing one of the

main planks of her platform and told voters that she could wrest adequate funding from the province to assist in that endeavour. However, she neglected to mention that the Ford government has already passed legislation that reduces the number of initiatives for housing infrastructure development for which cities can seek provincial funding.

The corporate and political establishment have taken the full measure of Chow, who has a long track record as a reliable functionary in the institutions of the capitalist state. First elected to city council in 1991, Chow, a long-time member of the NDP, served 14 years in that position and then eight years as the federal NDP member of parliament for the downtown Toronto riding of Trinity-Spadina. Chow, the long-time wife and now widow of former NDP leader Jack Layton, was a loyal hand-raiser for the NDP's ever-steady rightward shift.

Under Layton's leadership the NDP junked even its formal "paper" commitment to socialism, made an abortive 2008 coalition deal with the big business Liberals, repudiated its opposition to Canada's membership in NATO, and backed neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan and Libya. Today, Chow is fully on board with the NDP's governmental alliance with the big business Trudeau government and support for the reckless escalation of the war in Ukraine, rapid rearmament and integration of Canada ever more completely into the US military-strategic offensive against China.

Workers in Toronto should be under no illusions. Chow's career-long subservience to the dictates of the banks and corporations will continue during her term of office at Toronto City Hall.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**