Democratic Mayor Eric Adams says migrants “will destroy New York City”

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On Wednesday, the right-wing Democratic mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, told a town hall meeting that migrants were destroying New York City. For some time Adams has sought to dehumanize the thousands of asylum seekers who are arriving in the city, primarily from the US-Mexico border, however last week’s remarks marked a significant escalation of anti-immigrant rhetoric by the city’s Democratic political establishment.

Adams’ comments were followed by a police raid on an immigrant shelter and an announcement of budget cuts to city departments of 15 percent. Adams blamed the cuts on the cost of housing and feeding migrants.

“Let me tell you something, New Yorkers,” Adams said at the meeting on Manhattan’s wealthy Upper-West Side. “I don’t see an ending to this. This issue will destroy New York City. … It’s going to come to your neighborhoods.”

He added, “All of us are going to be impacted by this. I said it last year when we had 15,000 [migrants]. I’m telling you now with 110,000. The city we knew we’re about to lose.”

On Friday, the New York Police Department (NYPD) raided a migrant shelter in Brooklyn to confiscate what the NYPD claimed were illegal e-bikes.

The journal *The City* reported: “The situation quickly escalated, with officers wielding stun guns and shoving migrants to the ground before leaving with six men in handcuffs and trucks full of confiscated mopeds, according to videos and eyewitness accounts. … As men tried to move their mopeds, officers began shoving migrants to the ground and wielding stun guns at the increasingly agitated crowd.”

Six migrants were arrested and one was reportedly tased. These refugees, many of whom are under a 60-day city order to vacate the shelter, use the e-bikes to earn a living, for the most part as delivery workers. One worker told *The City*: “If we don’t work, how will we live? Every one of us has families.”

In another incident earlier in the week, a retired NYPD detective, working as a guard at a migrant shelter in Manhattan, pulled a handgun on a group of migrants.

The far-right has carried out a series of small protests at migrant shelters in Staten Island and at Gracie Mansion in Manhattan, the official residence of the mayor. It has responded with violence to counter-protesters.

On Saturday, Adams announced 15 percent cuts in the budgets of city departments, claiming they were made necessary by the cost of housing and feeding migrants. Agencies will be forced to cut costs by 5 percent by November, another 5 percent in January and a further 5 percent in time for the executive budget, which comes due in April, 2024. The executive budget is the spending plan the mayor proposes to the City Council.

In a statement, Adams said, “New York City cannot bear the burden of this national crisis on our own. But these spending reductions are what will have to happen if we continue on our current course.”

Adams’s remarks were condemned by immigrant, homeless and legal advocacy groups.

“The comments are uncalled for,” Murad Awawdeh, the executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition, told the media. “Using dangerous language sometimes leads to dangerous acts, and we don’t want people put in that situation.”

In a joint statement, the Coalition for the Homeless and the Legal Aid society said, “Mayor Adams’ remarks that the influx of new arrivals ‘will destroy New York City’ are reckless and unproductive fear-mongering. His dystopian comments dehumanize and villainize people who fled unimaginable situations in their home countries merely for an opportunity to provide for their families and secure a better life. This dangerous rhetoric is something you’d expect from fringe politicians on the far right of the political spectrum.”

Adams’ remarks were, indeed, hailed by the far-right. Former Vice President and candidate for the Republican presidential nomination Mike Pence observed on a radio program: “I’ve got to do a hat tip to the mayor of New York, who’s been willing to call out President Joe Biden and his administration for their absolute failure to secure the

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southern border."

Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy also endorsed Adams' remarks and called for passage of legislation that would resume building the wall along the US-Mexican border.

Perhaps the most telling praise came Friday from the neo-Nazi online rag *Daily Stormer*, which called Adams' remarks "based" [courageous], and those of a " proudly unfiltered person."

The far right did not have to wait until last week to praise Adams. It has been his position that the Biden administration supply aid to New York City to pay for the upkeep of migrants. On August 29, in a meeting with administration officials, he declared: "Any plan that states that all migrants must stay in New York City, that's a failed plan. Any plan that does not include stopping the flow at the border is a failed plan."

So-called "progressive" Democratic Party politicians mildly criticized Adams' rhetoric while taking care not to attack the reactionary and chauvinist premises that underlay it. Jumaane Williams, the city's public advocate, who is supported by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), tweeted, "We can be clear that NYC can't do this alone, while also being conscious of harmful words." Just one week before, Williams applauded Adams for housing migrants in a tent city in Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, two miles from a grocery store and three miles from the nearest public school.

Williams called Adams' remarks "hyperbole and damaging language" on a WNYC talk show on Saturday, while supporting Adams' demand for more federal aid. "The mayor's right," he said. "We can't do this by ourselves."

He went on to advocate a "decompression strategy" under which refugees would be removed from New York City and distributed around the country, arguing that "New York City has limited land mass." He concluded by saying Adams was "not xenophobic," but found himself "between a rock and hard place." He then made an appeal to racial politics.

DSA City Council Member Tiffany Caban called Adams' remarks "repugnant MAGA garbage," but could only muster in the way of an alternate policy: "Let's drop this demagoguery and invest in welcoming asylum seekers and getting them work." This echoes sections of the corporate elite who see the desperate migrants as a ready source of cheap labor.

Democratic congresswoman and DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) tweeted: "If we want to reduce the # of asylum seekers in general, we have to make US foreign policy part of this conversation. We must discuss US policy in Latin America, which often goes ignored by politicians & media alike, even though it's a major factor."

This comes from a politician has who has supported every reactionary element of the Biden administration's foreign policy, from arming Israel to the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Her statement, moreover, accepts the right-wing premise that reducing the number of asylum seekers is worthy goal, not that refugees fleeing poverty and state violence in their home countries—in most cases bound up with US imperialist intervention—have a fundamental democratic right to live and work in the country of their choice without legal restrictions or persecution.

None of the representatives of the DSA, like the Democratic Party as a whole, challenge the lying claim that New York City lacks the resources to provide for refugees. The most populous city in the US is the home of Wall Street, the financial center of world capitalism. It is also one of the most economically unequal cities in the world.

Half the population is so poorly paid it cannot afford the basic requirements of existence—shelter, food, healthcare. This is in a city that has 113 billionaires and thousands of multimillionaires.

A one-bedroom apartment costs nearly $5,000 a month, but tens of thousands of apartments remain unoccupied. Over half of the homeless in the city are native born, not migrants.

Adams' demonization of migrants will escalate violence by the far right and the NYPD. It will serve to justify a broad-ranging austerity program. It is further proof of the urgent necessity for the working class to break from the Democratic Party and capitalist politics and organize itself as an independent political force, in unity with workers all over the world, in the fight for equality and genuine democracy under socialism.

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