# Nithya Raman assembles billionaires, corporate interests and union bureaucrats to prepare her administration in Los Angeles

**Marc Wells**
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One of the first acts of Los Angeles Mayor-elect Nithya Raman, a self-described "democratic socialist," was to invite billionaires, corporate executives, real estate interests and Hollywood figures to help shape her administration. On November 20, Raman announced "A Committee for the City." Leslie Chang, co-chair of the Los Angeles chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), will sit alongside billionaire Snap CEO Evan Spiegel, luxury broker Jason Oppenheim and officials from the city's trade unions.

Raman owes her November 3 victory over incumbent Mayor Karen Bass to a shift to the left among workers and youth confronting soaring rents, poverty wages and homelessness. In the final Berkeley IGS/*Los Angeles Times* poll, 69 percent of likely voters under 30 backed Raman and just 15 percent backed Bass. Before she takes office on December 14, Raman has already given some of the principal beneficiaries of this inequality a say in whom she appoints and what policies she pursues.

Raman is following the example of New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a fellow DSA member. After winning the Democratic primary, Mamdani sought a private meeting with James Whelan, the chief lobbyist for New York's landlords and developers. The day after winning the general election, Mamdani named Maria Torres-Springer, first deputy mayor under Eric Adams, to help lead his transition. He went on to declare his intention to pursue a "partnership" with Donald Trump.

Raman and Mamdani are bourgeois politicians. Their use of the word "socialist" serves the political purpose of the DSA, a faction of the Democratic Party. As growing sections of the ruling class turn to fascism and dictatorial forms of rule, the DSA channels opposition to capitalism back into Democratic election campaigns and blocks the development of an independent political movement of the working class. The DSA can also count among its mayors Janeese Lewis George in Washington D.C., David Morales in Providence and Yousef Rabhi in Ann Arbor.

Raman's committee is tasked with advising on administration priorities, recruiting candidates for government positions and commissions and building partnerships with business and community leaders. In other words, the group is tasked with forging a strategy that will protect the socio-economic order, i.e., capitalism and the oligarchy, against the working class.

Among its most prominent members are Evan Spiegel, billionaire co-founder and CEO of Snap Inc., whose global technology company profits from advertising and data; Nick Pritzker, billionaire heir to one of America's wealthiest business dynasties, whose corporate holdings include Hyatt hotels; and Jason Oppenheim, founder of a luxury real estate brokerage, whose family has been involved in Los Angeles property development since his great-great-grandfather Jacob Stern founded Stern Realty in 1889.

These are the corporate and financial elite whose wealth and power are rooted in the immiseration of workers.

The committee also brings together the leadership of the trade union bureaucracies, whose role has been to suppress workers' power. Ada Briceño, co-president of UNITE HERE Local 11, and Rafael Jaime, president of UAW Local 4811, are among its members. Pete Rodriguez, a senior official of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, also sits on the committee.

In 2024, Rafael Jaime and the UAW bureaucracy shut down the strike of tens of thousands of University of California rank-and-file academic workers who had walked out in opposition to the crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests. After a court issued a temporary restraining order, Jaime sought to restrict and contain the struggle by instructing workers: "All striking academic workers should return to work Monday morning, in compliance with the court order."

Briceño is a fixture in union bureaucracy. Her quarter-century at the head of HERE and then UNITE HERE Local 11 is a record of systematic betrayal: as co-president of a

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local covering 62,000 of the most exploited, overwhelmingly immigrant workers in Southern California, she draws a salary of over $150,000 while she simultaneously served (until 2025) as chair of the Orange County Democratic Party and has used that dual position to strangle every genuine struggle of the rank and file.

She will sit next to Pritzker, against whom the workers she purports to represent fought. Under her leadership the union has repeatedly called off or shrunk strikes that workers voted for overwhelmingly. In 2023, the bureaucracy limited the struggle to brief strike waves that allowed hotel chains to maintain operations, while preemptively signing a deal with the Westin Bonaventure to remove 600 workers from the picket line. This same pattern was imposed during a walkout by 2,000 SoFi Stadium workers days before the 2026 World Cup after a 96 percent strike vote.

The committee has a substantial Hollywood and entertainment industry component. Issa Rae, actor, producer and founder of HOORAE Media, and Maha Dakhil, a managing director at Creative Artists Agency, represent different layers of the entertainment business. Rafael Agustin and Etienne Maurice are involved in filmmaking and cultural production, while Barbara Best operates in architecture and design.

Los Angeles is historically the center of the entertainment industry, yet, a deep socioeconomic, artistic and cultural crisis is unfolding, threatening tens of thousands of jobs. Production cutbacks, layoffs, the growth of precarious work and the restructuring of film and television production are the new normal.

The presence of industry figures reveals the policies Raman will pursue toward studio interests, production incentives, labor costs and the effort to restore Los Angeles as a competitive production center in the world market.

Tax incentives have been launched by both Democrats and Republicans, all for the benefit of mega-corporations that treat art like a commodity. In an interview with *Deadline*, Raman defended the existing California tax credit program: “The impact of the tax credits are clear.”

She has gone further, advocating an uncapped program that extends subsidies beyond below-the-line production workers to above-the-line personnel, including writers, producers and directors, a proposal that exposes her class orientation: she is fighting to carve out a larger slice of public funds for the top 10 percent.

There is also a religious grouping in the committee. Rabbi Sharon Brous of IKAR embodies liberal Zionism, which criticizes the Israeli government’s policies while defending Israel as a Jewish state, offering Raman a cover for her own pro-Zionist position. Father Brendan Busse of Dolores Mission Church and Asif Mahmood, a physician and religious-freedom commissioner, provide other religious institutional endorsements.

Religious organizations play an important role in social services and community life, but their presence also gives the mayor a network of established institutions that have long been committed to the preservation of capitalism.

Other members are drawn from municipal government, state administration, philanthropy and nonprofit organizations. City Controller Kenneth Mejia, former California State Treasurer Kathleen Brown and retired Harbor Commission member Diane Middleton represent government and public administration. Cynthia Mitchell-Heard of the Los Angeles Urban League, Renata Simril of the LA84 Foundation, Manju Kulkarni of AAPI Equity, David Levitus of LA Forward and Sergio Vargas of ACCE Action represent nonprofit, philanthropic and community advocacy institutions.

These organizations work in areas including inequality, housing, social services and community development. Their presence ensures that social grievances will be channeled into established advocacy networks and negotiations with City Hall, excluding the working class from any decision.

This is particularly evident in Raman’s participation in the city’s handling of homelessness: despite her “progressive” rhetoric, since 2020 as a councilmember she has facilitated the dismantling of encampments as humanitarian care and the funneling of hundreds of millions of dollars to private contractors and nonprofits that profit handsomely from the crisis without delivering results, including the restructuring of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA).

Los Angeles workers can only expect billionaires and other members of the committee to further degrade their living standards. A conscious fight for socialism is required to defend jobs, wages, housing and public services. This struggle must be waged independently of institutions dominated by the city’s wealthiest interests and the union bureaucracies and political opportunists that negotiate on their behalf.




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