

Layoffs plague Detroit city services

Our correspondent
26 August 2004

Nearly 400 Detroit city workers were laid off this summer by the Democratic mayor of Detroit, Kwame Kilpatrick. These layoffs are in addition to the thousands of jobs being cut from the Detroit public schools. The city has a deficit of \$333 million dollars, and is targeting city services to make up the shortfall.

Kilpatrick has lavished tax breaks and incentives on big business while telling residents there is no money for vital services. Millions have been poured into the coffers of real estate and other business interests as the city prepares to host the Super Bowl XL football game in 2006.

Among the layoffs are workers in vital areas such as the Water Department, where 40 jobs were lost. Half of the 60 coach service attendants and 40 auto mechanics were axed in the Department of Transportation.

According to workers at the Detroit Department of Transportation, due to the large number of buses in disrepair, only 150 of the 400 buses designated for peak hours are on the road. Detroit schools open this week, and thousands of students rely on city buses to get to class. Every day, 150,000 ride the buses in Detroit. One in four Detroit households has no access to a private automobile, making bus service a vital necessity. Detroit has no rapid transit system, and the regular bus service in the greater Detroit area, including its suburbs, is abysmal.

Last week, a group of disabled Detroit residents filed suit against the city and the US Department of Transportation because half the wheelchair lifts are broken on the city's fleet. The bus drivers cannot pick up disabled passengers without the lifts. One wheelchair user reported waiting three hours near downtown to take a 10-minute bus ride.

At an August rally of Detroit city workers organized to oppose the cuts, Ken Gray, a worker in the water and sewage department, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "The city administration is finding ways to milk money

out of the system. It has a domino effect on service. I think what you're seeing is the beginning of the end of decent services in the city. It's going to be catastrophic for a lot of people. It just bothers me that some people are making themselves rich off of it. It's like they're developing a caste system. But it's not just in Detroit that this is happening."

Todd Graves, a laid-off coach service attendant, said: "Nobody cares about the little person. Instead of cutting at the higher level, cutting their salaries, they are cutting us. We don't even get cost-of-living increases. A lot of us are single parents. I was a department manager at Kmart before this job. I thought that I was getting a more secure job."

AFSCME Local 312 leaders say the mayor is outsourcing bus repair work at a high cost to the city. According to John Miller of the union's grievance committee, 10 of the laid-off mechanics may be brought back as foremen. In the past, the union and city have been at odds about overtime pay required to keep the aging fleet of buses running.

At a special Detroit City Council Town Hall Meeting in July, city workers and their supporters spoke out against the cuts. But a call for a citywide strike to stop the layoffs was shunted aside. AFSCME Council 25 has no intention of organizing any action that would cut across their support for the Kerry and the Democratic Party.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact