Detroit: D'Artagnan Collier speaks to protesting city workers

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About 300 Detroit city workers rallied downtown near the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center on Wednesday afternoon to oppose Mayor David Bing's latest concession demands.

Socialist Equality Party candidate for mayor, D'Artagnan Collier, himself a city worker, addressed the rally. Collier was the only mayoral candidate present to speak about the concerns of the workers.

The privileged clique that controls Detroit politics is targeting public workers in the latest salvo against the jobs, wages and living conditions of the city's working class.

A massive assault on the public education system, endorsed by the Obama administration, is simultaneously under way. The region's autoworkers have already been victimized by layoffs, wage and pensions cuts and plant closures.

The city is demanding massive concessions from its roughly 15,000 workers, who have already suffered wage cuts this past year.

The new demands include:

• Twenty-six furlough days per year, without pay. This is equivalent to a 10 percent wage cut.

• Clearance for the city to carry out large-scale layoffs by combining or eliminating city departments.

• Ending of daily overtime pay. Overtime would only be realized on a weekly basis, after a worker has passed 40 hours. This would effectively end the eight-hour day for Detroit workers.

• Ending longevity pay, a small yearly bonus for workers with more than six years' experience.

• New disciplinary guidelines.

• For employees with less than five years experience, the number of vacation days per year would be reduced from 10 to 5 and sick days would be rolled back from 17 to 10.

The concessions demanded from city workers are part of a broader assault on the city's already meager social services. Bing called for further reductions in city services on Tuesday. Detroit confronts a deficit of between $275 million and $300 million, and Bing and the rest of the Democratic Party-controlled city leadership are intent on shifting the full burden onto the working class.

"There's going to be, without a doubt, a decrease in services," Bing said. "Any time that you have to cut back because of financial difficulties, services are not going to be what they need to be. I think we've got to be very focused on what's core in terms of services to our citizens."

Also on Tuesday, Bing asked that the City Council approve a budget amendment that would force 26 furlough days on nonunion city workers, again, equivalent to about 10 percent of annual salary. This measure would save the city about $7 million this year, according to the mayor.

Among those attending Wednesday's rally were workers from AFSCME (American Federation of State City and Municipal Employees) Local 207, along with teachers, other workers, youth, and members of the SEP, who spoke with workers and distributed fliers for a Saturday meeting (See "A new political perspective for the working class").

The anger the city workers expressed at the rally toward Bing, Collier's opponent in the forthcoming primary elections, was palpable. Chants of "Hey Hey, Ho Ho, Dave Bing has got to go!" and "Dave Bing, you gotta stop it. Get your hands out of our pocket!" punctuated the picketing.

In speaking with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters, workers condemned the entire political leadership of

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the city, and blamed Detroit's plight on the enrichment of Wall Street banks.

After local union leaders addressed the crowd at the end of the picketing, the megaphone was turned over to Collier.

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