

Mass abstention in Detroit mayoral elections

SEP candidate wins significant vote

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Only one out of six eligible voters in Detroit participated in the “non-partisan” primary election held Tuesday in a sign of mass alienation from the political system in the city, which has long been dominated by the Democratic Party.

Millionaire businessman and current mayor, David Bing, who enjoyed the backing of the city’s corporate and political elite, won 74 percent of the vote and will face second place finisher Tom Barrow, who received 11 percent, in a run-off election November 3.

Despite a virtual media blackout of the candidates opposing Bing, D’Artagnan Collier, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for Detroit mayor, received 1,265 votes—or roughly 1.4 percent of the ballots cast. Collier advanced a socialist answer to the crisis confronting the working class in the city, which has been hammered by the downsizing of the auto industry and has a Depression-level unemployment rate of 25 percent.

Immediately after being declared the winner, Bing outlined plans to slash social services and cut 500 to 700 city workers’ jobs. Speaking on WWJ Radio Wednesday morning he said, “along with the massive layoffs, a four day work week, furlough days and bidding out some city services are ideas to cut the city’s budget deficit.”

Barrow, a Democratic Party stalwart who has run unsuccessfully in previous mayoral races and championing fiscal responsibility and “cutting waste,” offers no political alternative to the anti-working class policies of Mayor Bing.

Tuesday’s primary election also included candidates for city council, charter commission and school board. Voters narrowed the city council field to 18 candidates (from 167) who will now compete for 9 seats in the

November general election. Several first time candidates were elected, including Charles Pugh, a TV journalist, who received the most votes.

Monica Conyers, wife of Congressman John Conyers and the former president pro tem of the City Council, was soundly defeated. She was forced to resign last month after pleading guilty to federal bribery charges, in which she is accused of accepting \$6,000 in bribes in exchange for her swing vote on a \$47 million sludge-hauling deal.

November’s election will be the fourth mayoral election in Detroit this year. In September 2008, Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, who had been hailed as a rising star in the Democratic Party, was forced to resign as part of a deal, in which he agreed to plead guilty to two felonies and an obstruction of justice charge.

The naked corruption of the Democratic Party machine in Detroit is the culmination of a long process. In Detroit, like many other cities, a layer of middle class blacks was elevated into positions of political and economic power in the aftermath of the ghetto rebellions of the 1960s. This was done to encourage illusions that police brutality, poverty and racial discrimination could be addressed within the framework of capitalism and the two-party system.

The black Democratic politicians, such as Detroit Mayor Coleman Young and his successors, defended the interests of big business just as obediently as their white counter-parts, and enriched themselves and their friends, while imposing the dictates of the corporations on the backs of workers—black, white and immigrant.

David Bing, like President Obama, was a beneficiary of Affirmative Action and other policies designed to create a black elite to help preside over the attack on the working class. The owner of Bing Group, a major steel and auto parts supplier to Ford, he is one of the

richest African Americans in the US.

The media has claimed the vote for Bing—who received the support of little more than 10 percent of eligible voters in the city—is a mandate for his reactionary policies. Tuesday’s editorial in the *Detroit News* shouted, “Good Job, Detroit,” while the *Detroit Free Press* said, “No more waiting: Detroit must change.”

The satisfaction of the news media runs counter to the social reality in the city. Explosive class tensions are building up that can find no expression in the political system and they will inevitably erupt to the surface. The working class in Detroit—which has a rich and deep tradition of class struggle—will once again enter into mass struggles.

During the course of the Socialist Equality Party campaign, D’Artagnan Collier was the only candidate who addressed himself to the working class and explained the need for workers to break with the Democrats and Republicans and build the SEP as a mass political party of the working class based on a socialist program.

The 1,265 votes Collier received, while not yet a mass vote, was significant, particularly under conditions of a mass abstention in the elections. Many workers—who would otherwise not have gone to the polls—decided to make a conscious decision to vote for a socialist candidate. This is an indication of the growing understanding of the need for a political alternative for the working class.



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