

Detroit city workers oppose concessions, layoffs

21 August 2009

More than 500 city workers and their supporters rallied outside the Coleman A. Young building in downtown Detroit Wednesday evening to protest the concessions demands, layoffs and destruction of city services proposed by Mayor David Bing.

Workers from virtually every city service were represented, including water works employees, sanitation workers, bus drivers and health care employees.

Bing plans to cut city workers' pay by 10 to 20 percent through furloughs and workweek reductions. Earlier this month, the mayor announced that there would be at least another 1,000 job cuts. Bing is giving workers until August 28 to agree to cuts, threatening to place the city into receivership if they do not.

The rally was called by American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 207 and endorsed by ACSMCE Council 25, the collection of locals in Michigan. AFSCME endorsed Bing during the primary elections and has fully supported the Democratic Party establishment in the city. City unions have indicated they are prepared to accept concessions and are looking for a deal with Bing.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed statements to the workers calling for the formation of independent rank-and-file committees, in opposition to AFSCME and the other unions. The statement calls for the building of an independent political movement of the working class, opposed to the Democrats and Republicans, and based on a socialist perspective. (See, "For a united movement of Detroit workers! Form rank-and-file committees to oppose concessions!")

A city nurse spoke to the WSWs about the implications of Bing's cuts for access to health services. "They want to lay us off, and there's not a lot

of us to begin with. So, they'll have to close clinics, which is the last resort for health care for many people. We treat a variety of ailments: diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases and even lead poisoning among children, because of the deteriorating housing. I was supposed to be assigned to a flu clinic in the fall, but if we're laid off, how can these clinics stay open?"

A city bus driver reported that there have been 118 layoff notices sent to Detroit Department of Transportation workers within the last two weeks. Bing has indicated that the city plans on eliminating bus service on the weekend.

D'Artagnan Collier, a city worker who ran as the SEP's mayoral candidate in the August primaries, addressed workers.

Collier denounced AFSCME, of which he is a member, for supporting Bing. He denounced the cynical moves of the union to renounce its support for Bing earlier this week, when it was clear that Bing had planned to cut city workers' wages all along. (see accompanying video)

AFSCME leaders attempted to stop Collier from addressing the rally, which took place on a public street around the Coleman Young Municipal building in downtown Detroit. City workers defended Collier's right to speak, after which the union officials backed off.



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