

Obama aide Rahm Emanuel elected mayor of Chicago

Alexander Fangmann, Kristina Betinis
25 February 2011

On Tuesday, February 22, Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's former chief of staff and long-time Democratic insider, was elected mayor of Chicago, replacing Richard M. Daley. By collecting 55.2 percent of the votes cast in the six-way race, Emanuel won the position outright, obviating the need for a run-off.

Emanuel's victory was an expression of the ruling elite's need for a ruthless figure who can carry out an all-out assault on Chicago's working class, and municipal workers in particular. The city faces a budget deficit estimated at \$600 million, and Emanuel has already called for a spending freeze and \$75 million in cuts as the down payment on making working people pay for the crisis.

Emanuel's status as the consensus candidate of all sections of the Democratic Party establishment gave a preordained character to the election. Even when his residency was being challenged in court, few seriously believed he would be removed from the ballot. He had the tacit support of the outgoing mayor, and what remains of the Daley machine, with ward heelers handing out cards boosting Emanuel at many precinct polling places.

Indeed, the orchestrated character of the whole affair can be seen in the shuffle of political insiders that saw Richard Daley's brother, William Daley, take Emanuel's place in the White House as Obama's chief of staff. This trade, described by *Chicago Tribune* columnist John Kass as "smart politics the Chicago Way," is a reflection of the narrowly inbred and undemocratic character of the American political establishment.

That Emanuel's election was a foregone conclusion contributed to depressing the election turnout, only 41 percent of registered voters. This figure was well below the predicted turnout of 50 percent or more. Most

workers rightly concluded that the Democratic machine and the remains of Daley's personal organization would come out overwhelmingly in favor of Emanuel, and that none of the candidates expressed their interests anyway.

Emanuel's favored status among the bourgeoisie is manifested in the amount of campaign contributions he was able to raise. Emanuel's organization brought in \$13 million, a staggering sum for a municipal election. This was several times more than the campaign contributions mustered by all the other candidates combined. Choosing the next mayor of Chicago is serious business for the ruling elite, and nothing was left to chance.

Emanuel's largest share of the vote came from relatively affluent wards located downtown as well as many of the wards bordering Lake Michigan. These wards have large concentrations of the city's wealthy and professionals who work in or around the finance industry. Many of the most working class wards in the city saw turnouts of 30 percent or less.

The wards with the highest turnout were those with large concentrations of municipal workers, particularly police and firefighters. The police and firefighters unions came out heavily for Emanuel's most well-funded opponent, former Daley aide Gery Chico, calculating that he would be less destructive of their pensions than Emanuel, who promised major cuts. On this basis, Chico was able to garner 24 percent of the vote.

Chico and the third- and fourth-place candidates, former senator Carol Moseley-Braun and city clerk Miguel del Valle, had support primarily in Hispanic and black wards, where they appealed on the basis of their ethnicity rather than political program. None of them offered any significant difference to the right-

wing politics and ruthlessness of Emanuel.

Now that Emanuel has won, he will use the city budget deficit as the pretext for going to war with Chicago workers, starting with municipal employees and teachers, and will attack their wages, benefits and pensions. However, in doing so, he will pursue the Democratic strategy, which involves working closely with the unions to rein in any working class revolts, rather than dispensing with them altogether. This is the perspective underlining the Democratic opposition to Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's attack on public employees in that state.

As in Wisconsin, the unions can be expected to accept without question the need for rank-and-file workers to sacrifice their living standards, while defending only those provisions that protect their own organizational existence as well as their continued ability to police their own members.

Politically, Emanuel was one of the most right-wing figures in both the Clinton and Obama administrations, as well as in Congress. While chairing the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, his strategy was to recruit a number of extremely conservative Democrats and run them against Republicans in marginal districts, a strategy that met with some success, although many of these right-wing Democrats would eventually lose their seats in the 2010 elections.

Paul Begala, former Clinton aide and a long-time friend of Emanuel, celebrated his unlimited opportunism, declaring, "He swims effortlessly back and forth between principle and pragmatism." In the current context, this can only mean that Emanuel's promises to "rethink city government" will involve drawing up plans for the destruction and privatization of city services, while criticizing any opposition to the cuts as insufficiently tough-minded.

Due to his outright win in the first round of municipal elections, Emanuel is in a position to use a portion of his leftover campaign money to shape the results of aldermanic election run-offs. By and large, this will mean financing the opponents of those aldermen who supported Chico or Moseley-Braun in the election, and who could be expected to advocate a softer line toward city workers and teachers.

Emanuel's policies will quickly lead to confrontations with workers, who face threats to their current living standards and their pensions, as well as

increased costs for basic needs. The further erosion of city services and the continued dismantling of public education will also bring into conflict wider layers of the working class who depend on these services, which by any objective measure should be considered basic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact