

# Rally against emergency manager law: A conspiracy against Detroit workers

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Under the guise of opposing the threat of an emergency manager (EM) in Detroit, a highly-orchestrated rally was held by Detroit's Democratic Party establishment Monday evening.

The ostensible purpose of the meeting, organized by Detroit City Council member JoAnn Watson with the support of the trade unions, was to push for 100,000 more signatures to a ballot initiative aimed placing the existing EM law on the ballot.

Michigan's Public Act 4 law on emergency managers enacted earlier this year is thoroughly reactionary and undemocratic. Appointed executives have the right to remove elected officials, void collective bargaining agreements, and impose budget cuts and sell city assets. On the basis of previous laws, EMs in Pontiac, Flint, Ecorse and Benton Harbor, as well as the Detroit public schools, have already moved to implement drastic cuts.

The aim of the rally and the campaign, however, is to hoodwink the public, and city workers in particular, into believing a struggle is taking place to defend their rights. Behind the scenes, discussions are taking place between Republican and Democratic Party officials, along with the trade unions, over the best way to impose massive concessions on a workforce that has endured a continuous wave of job and benefit cuts.

Attended by about 200 people, Monday's event was carefully stage managed to ensure that there was no opportunity for the public to speak and raise concerns. Very few workers were in attendance, and the crowd consisted mainly of city officials, their allies, and a well-heeled stratum of the upper middle class. Among those called to play their part were various organizations in Detroit that make a specialty of "left" posturing, racial politics, and

absolute support for the Democratic Party.

The Detroit political establishment as a whole is seeking to present the EM law primarily in racial terms—as a conflict between "white" Republican Lansing and "black" Democratic Detroit. The aim is to divert attention from the anti-working class policies of the Democrats, prevent a united struggle of workers in Detroit and Michigan against unemployment and austerity, and defend the particular prerogatives of a section of the Detroit elite.

The rally was led by individuals and organizations that play a critical role in Detroit politics. These include US Congressman John Conyers; Wendell Anthony, president of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP; Detroit Council members Kwame Kenyatta and Brenda Jones; several prominent ministers; and Al Garrett and Saundra Williams, union officials in the metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO. They were joined by representatives a number of pro-Democratic Party organizations, including Michigan Welfare Rights, the Moratorium Now Coalition founded by the Workers World Party, and the Communist Party.

US Congressman John Conyers began by declaring, "Emergency managers, so called, are merely a dictatorial ruse for a governor to take over and suspend democratic management."

Whatever the posturing of Democratic Party officials such as Conyers, however, the majority of the EMs presently active were installed by Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm. Several of the EMs, such as the manager in Benton Harbor and Roy Roberts, the Emergency Manager in the Detroit Public Schools, are black Democrats.

Al Garrett, President of AFSCME Council 25, who has been involved in contract negotiations with Detroit Mayor David Bing and has played a major role in gathering signatures, admonished the audience demagogically to "stand up."

Garrett added, “Our mothers and fathers fought for one thing: self-determination. It would be unacceptable and unnecessary for black folk in the city of Detroit, for white folk in Ann Arbor....to allow anybody that was selected by chance to dictate what happens in their community.”

For Garrett, “self-determination” means the ability of a section of the privileged black upper-middle class and corporate elite to control Detroit’s resources and benefit despite the impoverishment of the entire population.

For his part, Anthony used the issue of race to camouflage the real purpose of the law. He asked rhetorically why Detroit and other predominantly black communities were singled out when national and state governments also run deficits.

“We are not going back to the plantation,” he declared. For the vast majority of the population of Detroit, however, conditions are already disastrous, with poverty and real unemployment over 50 percent.

In contrast, anyone who knows Anthony knows that he is not reluctant to flaunt his wealth. He, and other sections of upper middle class blacks in Detroit, have benefited from the affirmative action set asides with the city government while the majority of the population, especially working class blacks, have grown dramatically poorer.

Jerry Goldberg, a leading member of the Moratorium Now! Coalition and Workers World, was anxious to prove his usefulness. He espoused the demagoguery of black nationalism in stronger terms than anyone in the room, despite the fact that he is white.

“This bill is out to stop the rights of black Detroiters,” he declared. “Its aim is to take away the right to self-determination. We should sue the government and recover the billions that were stolen. We want reparations for the billions that were stolen from us.”

All of these figures, from Conyers to Goldberg, are seeking to cover for the fact that they are just as equally committed to attacking the working class, black and white, as the Republicans.

In fact, while union officials were denouncing the EM law, substantial concessions have already been agreed to in discussions with Mayor Bing. Bing, who initially offered himself as a candidate for emergency manager, now declares that an EM is not needed because he will be able to secure sufficient cuts without it. He has called for 1,000 layoffs of city workers, along with a 10 percent wage cut and 20 percent cut in benefits.

The Detroit City Council, which includes Watson, wants to go further than Bing, calling for 2,300 job cuts, including hundreds of fire department positions.

The *Detroit News*, which speaks for the city’s corporate elite, reported on Tuesday that the unions have agreed to cuts of over \$102 million this fiscal year and \$258 million in 2012-13. The information was given anonymously because the unions are supporting a confidentiality agreement prohibiting speaking in public. The last thing they want is for workers to know in advance what they are preparing.

From the standpoint of the unions, the EM law is beneficial because it allows them to blackmail workers, insisting that they must accept drastic cuts as the only alternative.

The big problem, according to the report, is the uniformed unions consisting of the police and firefighters. “The frustrating part is everything is going so slow,” the *News* quoted its anonymous source. “There has to be something presented to the governor ASAP. If we don’t get the uniformed folks to sign off on the concessions, it’s game, set, match.”

On Wednesday the *News* wrote an editorial calling for the pension and health care benefits of retired city workers to be cut. Both the *News* and Republican Governor Rick Snyder have said they would prefer Detroit city officials and the unions work out an agreement rather than appoint an emergency manager.

Last week Snyder appointed a 10-member review team to review Detroit’s finances, a necessary step prior to the appointment of an EM. The team is led by Michigan State Treasurer Andy Dillon, a Democrat. The review team, highly praised by local Democrats, has six black Detroit members, all of whom are Democrats with ties to major corporations and Wall Street.

There is enormous opposition in Detroit to the cuts being proposed by the Bing and Snyder administrations. However, this opposition finds no expression in the Democratic Party, the trade unions, or their various adjuncts. A fight against the cuts and anti-democratic laws requires the building of independent organs of struggle and an independent political movement of the working class.



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