

# Democrats seek to defuse opposition to Detroit library cuts

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The Detroit Library Commission has voted to re-open the Monteith Library on Detroit's eastside. The motion was carried at a January 17 commission meeting, which gave staff 20 workdays to draw up a plan to re-open the branch.

The Monteith branch was shuttered in December along with three other branch libraries in the city: Lincoln, Mark Twain Annex and Richard. The closures sparked protests by community residents, determined to prevent a further decimation of services in neighborhoods ravaged by decades of cuts.

The library commission ordered the closures citing severe staff shortages due to the layoff of 82 library personnel last year. The commission originally slated six branches for closure. Following a series of protests by Westside and eastside Detroit neighborhoods they later reduced the number to four.

While residents of the Monteith neighborhood are understandably pleased that their library is scheduled to reopen, there are many issues left unresolved. There are presently no plans to recall laid off staff or reopen the three other closed libraries. Jo Anne Mondowney, executive director of the Detroit Public Library, said that they might readjust library hours and share staff with other libraries to facilitate the reopening of Monteith.

Further, the reopening of Monteith appears to be a calculated move by a section of the political establishment in Detroit to defuse opposition to the library closures and forestall the development of a broader social movement in opposition to the program of budget cuts, concessions and layoffs now under discussion by Detroit Mayor David Bing and the city council.

Various middle class protest organizations that function as a wing of the Democratic Party have sought

to co-opt the protests against library closings and channel them behind big business politicians that are bitter enemies of working people in Detroit. One such group is By Any Means Necessary (BAMN), which has sought to insert itself into the protests in order to provide a "left" cover for a section of the political establishment.

BAMN has organized a series of stunts that have led to the intervention of the police, including the attempted occupation of the Lincoln branch last month in which eleven people were arrested.

BAMN is working with Detroit City Councilwoman JoAnn Watson to dissipate the anger over the cuts by trying to convince working people that the council and library commission really speak for their interests. In fact, BAMN is intricately involved in the behind the scenes efforts by the Democrats to impose the cuts.

In remarks published January 15 in the *Michigan Citizen*, BAMN organizer Joyce Schon hailed a toothless resolution introduced by Watson and passed by the Detroit City Council earlier this month calling on Republican Governor Rick Snyder to reinstate public library funds from the state's budget surplus.

Schon claimed the resolution showed that "elected officials stand with the citizens of Detroit." The idea that Snyder, who is currently demanding that the city of Detroit carry out massive budget cuts or face a state takeover, will provide more money for libraries is absurd.

Moreover, Schon's praise for the City Council comes at a time when the council is proposing massive attacks on city workers, including up to 2,300 layoffs. Previous cuts implemented by the Democratic Bing administration and the City Council have left public transportation in shambles and dangerously undermined fire protection. This is a city that already suffers a real

unemployment rate near 50 percent where tens of thousands of people live without gas or electricity.

BAMN also promotes identity politics by claiming that black Democratic politicians in the city are standing up to the “white” corporate and political establishment. These reactionary politics are aimed at dividing the working class, while tying African American workers to the Democratic Party.

This is not the first time that BAMN has allied with Watson against workers in Detroit. Last June BAMN joined publically with Councilwoman Watson in hailing the conversion of the public school for pregnant and parenting teens, Catherine Ferguson Academy, into a for profit charter school.

Leaders of BAMN have also offered to field volunteers and raise money to keep libraries running if the Library Commission does not restore full funding. This is a retrograde proposal, which must be rejected. Working people should not be forced to bear the burden of a crisis they did not create. All libraries should be fully staffed with qualified, paid employees equipped with up to date technology. The money for libraries, schools and other basic services must come from a sharp increase in taxes on the corporations and the wealthy.

The struggle must continue for the reopening of all the shuttered libraries and the rehiring of all laid-off library personnel. This requires mobilizing the strength of workers and young people in the communities independently of the library commission and Democratic politicians and their apologists such as BAMN.



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