

# “Dirty tricks” and voter disqualification in Detroit mayoral vote

Lawrence Porter  
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A ruling by the Michigan Board of Canvassers is expected soon in regard to the results of the August 6 Detroit mayoral primary. The Wayne County election board refused to certify the election results after it came to light that election supervisors discounted more than one-fifth of votes cast in the city.

On election night, August 6, former Detroit Medical Center CEO Mike Duggan was announced the winner with 44,395 votes. The union-backed head of the Wayne County Sheriff’s office, Benny Napoleon, came in second, with 28,352 votes.

These results were overturned when the County Clerk’s office, led by Napoleon supporter Cathy Garrett, refused to accept numerals rather than hash—or tally—marks, in the official count (i.e., she rejected the use of “2” instead of “II,” “3” instead of “III,” “4” instead of “IIII,” etc.) at various polling districts. The change would have stripped Duggan of 20,425 write-in votes, nearly half of his total, and given the first place position in the primary to Napoleon.

Garrett is the county’s chief election officer and the sister of AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) Council 25 president Al Garrett, who also backs Napoleon.

Initially, according to the *Detroit Free Press*, Garrett “said it is the board’s policy to only count write-in votes that are tallied in poll books with a hash mark.” Later she claimed her concern was that the votes were being counted too quickly, “... two hours when it usually takes two weeks.”

The hash marks argument was dismissed by Chris Thomas, State Elections Director, who said, “I don’t see any authority to disqualify votes” based on “lack of hash marks.”

Jocelyn Benson, dean of the Wayne State Law School, told the *Free Press* that the law did not require

the recording of hash marks for write-in votes and that the Michigan Supreme Court had ruled that a vote for a write-in candidate should count when the voter’s intent was clear. “Nothing in the law says these ballots—if properly cast—should, as a result of an error in tallying, not ultimately be counted,” Benson stated.

Lansing City Clerk Chris Swope told the *Free Press* he did “not understand why the absence of hash marks would invalidate votes. ‘I don’t think I’ve ever heard that it’s required to do the hash marks.’”

The decider in this case, the Michigan State Board of Canvassers, has been given 10 days to come up with a ruling. The board of canvassers is a politically divided body with a record of political chicanery. The supposed oversight board involved itself in controversy last year when Republicans on the board tried to keep a challenge to the anti-emergency manager law off the ballot. Over 220,000 signatures opposing the reactionary law had been collected, 40 percent more than the required number, but the right-wing challengers claimed that the petitions’ font size was too small.

No matter what the decision of the board of canvassers, the dispute will not change the composition of the November ballot. The top two vote-getters (Duggan and Napoleon) will run against each other in the general election.

Nonetheless, the miserable affair points to ongoing attempts at voter disenfranchisement in Detroit and across the country, by both the Democrats and Republicans, as well as the sordid role of the AFL-CIO.

There was no enthusiasm for the August 6 Detroit primary. Only 18 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote, reflecting the high degree of alienation by Detroiters from the entire process. At any rate, the winner of the mayoral election will be a mere

figurehead and will serve at the pleasure of the city's true power, Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, who runs the city in the interests of the bankers.

Both candidates in the mayoral election are right-wing Democratic Party politicians. Duggan was the clear choice of the business elite who gave him close to \$3 million for his campaign. He was responsible for massive job cuts at the Detroit Medical Center, lowering the operating costs of the public health system and leading its sale to the for-profit Vanguard Systems. Not coincidentally, Duggan netted millions in the latter process.

The repudiation by the voters of the "labor" candidate, Napoleon, was another expression of the collapse in support for the Michigan AFL-CIO, which was stunned last year by the passage of right-to-work legislation. Former Detroit police chief Napoleon was endorsed not only by AFSCME Council 25, but also by the UAW. The latter's president, Bob King, pointed to Napoleon's experience with the Detroit Police Department as a key factor in the UAW's choice!

As the unions line up with the forces of law and order, including working behind the scenes with Orr, they come out more and more openly as enemies of democratic rights. Duggan's victory came in the face a series of maneuvers by the unions to keep him off the ballot or to confuse voters. Garrett's skullduggery is only the most recent and most blatant of these anti-democratic machinations.



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