

Workers and youth denounce social conditions, express no confidence in Chicago mayoral candidates

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In the final days heading into the April 7th runoff vote for the Chicago mayoral election, there is widespread consensus among workers and youth that their interests cannot find expression in the existing political structure.

There is growing awareness that the Democratic Party, no less than the Republican, is waging a relentless assault on the living standards of the population. The first round of elections in February was characterized by mass abstention, with a near-record low turnout of 34 percent, despite a multimillion-dollar campaign and a presidential endorsement for Rahm Emanuel.

In a significant debacle for the Democratic Party, the incumbent mayor Emanuel—a former official in the Obama administration—failed to get even a majority vote, triggering a runoff election.

Formerly an investment banker, Emanuel is an unflagging servant for the corporate and financial aristocracy who is widely hated among the population for his attacks on public education, the closing of mental health clinics, and attacks on workers' pensions.

Sensing growing fears of a political confrontation between the working class with the Democratic Party, various pseudo-left outfits and unions have sought to revive illusions in the Democrats with a vote for a “progressive” candidate, Jesus “Chuy” Garcia. In reality, Garcia is an establishment Democrat who oversaw more than \$400 million in cuts as Cook County Commissioner.

In his financial plan entitled “Towards Fiscal Sustainability” Garcia outlines a series of cuts to city programs and departments highlighting the threats of a municipal bankruptcy. Garcia has sought to ensure that the unions—and various phony “community” organizations close to the Democratic Party—play a critical role in enacting cuts to workers' benefits and pensions. “I do not support cutting benefits for current city employees

until we have a dialogue,” Garcia recently noted.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers and youth around the city on the upcoming elections and the deteriorating social conditions for masses of people. Masses of people in the city are struggling to survive, making a mockery of claims by the Obama administration and the political establishment that a genuine economic recovery is underway.

Laura expressed her disgust at the political system, stating she was not going to vote. “Workers shouldn’t pay for the cuts,” she noted in response to the program of cuts by both Garcia and Emanuel. “Why are they closing schools? What’s the alternative for our children? There’s no social structure for them when you close the schools,” Laura said.

When the conversation turned to housing, gentrification and the attacks on low-income housing she said, “SROs [single-room occupancy housing] are closing down. I live in one and they’re closing it down.”

Laura went on to state that the political establishment is shutting down SROs in order to renovate the buildings and raise rent for wealthier occupants, which is forcing out people on low income.

“With someone like me on fixed income, it’s kinda hard for me to pay \$700 for rent when my check’s only \$733 and it’s going to screw you out of your bills and everything. There’s this making this city for the rich. The wealthy class doesn’t pay attention to us. The upper and rich are just trying to come and take over. They’re moving everyone on the line or under the line away.

When asked if either Emanuel or Garcia represent ordinary working people, **Ellie** laughed, “No, both are dirty. One has more money than the other. One was a commissioner that made cuts. Workers need an alternative. That would be nice,” Laura said.

“My point of view is that neither one of them can do the job for us,” said **Willie**, a retired streets and sanitation worker.

When asked what he thought about the program of aggressive social cuts supported by both mayoral candidates, he responded, “I don’t think they should bring attacks on workers. Too many schools are closing right now. 50 schools are closed. What are the kids going to do now? What alternative do they have? They have no structure. No jobs. The options left are gangs...

“We are screwed over here as far as politics is concerned. Conditions for my friends have changed for the worse. A friend of mine had his Medicaid cut off. He’s got to pay out of pocket now.”

“I used to get \$200 in food stamps a month,” Willie noted, speaking about the bipartisan attacks on food stamps, with billions in cuts carried out by both the Democrats and the Republicans.

“Then they knocked me down to \$160. Then they knocked me down to \$32. Now all of a sudden they knocked me down to \$16. What can I do with \$16?...Now they’re going to tell me I don’t get any. Because I get disability and Social Security, they tell me that I make too much. Why are you [the politicians] cutting my stamps? When you’re enriching the rich and making me poorer than I already am.”

On being informed about the \$8.5 billion in food stamp cuts by the Obama administration, working with the Republicans, **David** told the WSWS, “The cuts have hurt me a great deal. I used to have \$180 a month. Now I have to survive on only \$40.

“I’m also on disability. I do side jobs and odds and ends. There are no good jobs in the city,” he said.

Ian, a worker in the area, expressed his doubts about both candidates: “Frankly, I’m skeptical about the election. Whoever has the most money wins. It depends on the power of money, as we saw with the attacks on schools by Rahm.

“I haven’t looked that much into Chuy. I just had a daughter and my life’s been pretty crazy. All I know is they don’t pay attention to the working class. They pay attention to the wealthy. The upper rich class is trying to take everything.” Ian expressed his agreement that workers need an alternative party that speaks for the interests of workers.

Angel, a cook, expressed her opposition to both candidates. “Chuy’s been promising a lot, like all politicians. But when they get into office they lie. They don’t speak for me,” she said.

“If you can’t work, you can’t live. I work two jobs and am still struggling to get by. When I was younger, I used to sell drugs and I made more money. Now I can’t even take care of my four kids,” Angel said.

Sean, a cook at a hospital, had no confidence in either candidate. “They’re all crooks.” He added, “Where I work, I haven’t gotten back pay in months. They have money for buildings but no money for wages? Working people like us don’t have any voice. But they’re scared of workers.”

Andrew, a student, at first expressed half-hearted and contradictory support for Emmanuel, “I guess for a city like this you need a guy with experience like Rahm.” When asked about the social conditions, Andrew referred to school closings and the transformation of large areas into upscale housing for the rich. “You look at the schools like Trumbull which they closed. They’re now turning it into condominiums. They’re gentrifying this place,” he said.

“The corporations finance Rahm. There are things he’s done that have hurt the lower class. People like me—students—who survive on student loans. To be quite honest, it doesn’t matter who wins the elections. These elections are all very expensive. Ordinary people can’t really buy an election when it takes millions of dollars,” Andrew said.

While Emanuel and Garcia may have tactical differences over how best to utilize the unions, they both agree on a program of austerity and budget cuts. Both candidates seek to further enrich the financial elite through massive cuts to social services and workers’ living standards.



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