

Right-wing Democrat reelected as Chicago mayor

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Incumbent Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel won Tuesday's first-ever runoff election, beating his challenger, Cook County Commissioner Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, to win a second term. Emanuel retained his seat with a little more than 55 percent of the vote to Garcia's 44 percent.

Voter turnout in the city was 39 percent, slightly higher than during the first-round election February 24, where five candidates divided a near-record low turnout of 34 percent. Emanuel's margin is expected to widen as the thousands of mail-in ballots are counted.

Garcia carried wards with large Spanish-speaking and immigrant populations and led among families with children in Chicago Public Schools, while Emanuel posted majorities in historically African-American wards, in white working-class areas, and on the affluent north lakeshore. A CBS exit poll indicated that those who identified as union households were split nearly evenly between the candidates.

Having survived an election that demonstrated the vast unpopularity of his right-wing, pro-business policies, Emanuel is preparing to move even further to the right, with a frontal assault on the pensions of city workers, including teachers, and city services.

The vehicle for a new round of cuts will be the claims of a "fiscal crisis" involving estimated unfunded pension obligations of about \$20 billion. The choice of pensions as the scapegoat for the crisis is entirely arbitrary and false, since one could more justly say the fiscal crisis is caused by state and federal cuts in aid to the cities, or the collapse of tax revenues stemming from Emanuel's handouts to corporate Chicago.

The focus on pensions, promoted by the media as soon as the returns from Tuesday's elections came in, is aimed at intimidating opposition to the impending cuts with the claim that there is "no money" to meet supposedly exorbitant pension payments.

In the coming year Chicago is required by law to pay an additional \$550 million to make up major city pension fund shortfalls brought on by the "pension holidays" under the previous administration of Richard M. Daley, when city leaders chose not to make payments to the pension funds. Last year, Illinois legislators cut pensions for 57,000 city workers, dumping responsibility for about \$10 billion in pension payments.

Major cuts are being planned across the state in the bipartisan plan to reduce the deficit without raising taxes or borrowing. This week, in an effort to immediately close a \$1.6 billion budget shortfall, Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner—a Republican who has close ties to Emanuel—suspended \$26 million in funding for social services affecting immigrant integration programs, funerals and burials for those on public assistance, autism support, youth support and HIV-AIDS programs. A plan worked out by Rauner and Democratic legislative leaders will slash 2.25 percent of state spending across the board for the last three months of the current fiscal year.

Throughout the campaign, Emanuel worked to place the city's financial crisis at the center of the runoff, commenting to the *Washington Post*, "Who is better to steer this ship and right this ship financially, educationally and continue to make the critical investments? That's the question. And that's what people have to decide."

Emanuel's reelection is by no means a popular mandate for the pro-business and anti-working class policies of the Democratic Party. There was no alternative on the ballot, since the so-called "progressive" opponent Garcia did not propose substantially different policies. More than half the eligible voters did not go to the polls.

The political forces behind the Garcia campaign—the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, the Chicago Teachers Union and Service Employees International Union, and the International Socialist Organization—are presenting the runoff campaign as a success, claiming it

had the effect of convincing Emanuel to be slightly less dictatorial in managing the city.

CTU president Karen Lewis, who will negotiate a new contract for more than 20,000 teachers this year, broadcasted a statement via text message, “Together we brought a landmark election season to Chicago! For our contract, let’s keep engaging Chicagoans to ensure the best for our students.”

Last year, Lewis made the opening move in the negotiations in a press statement to *Crain’s* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, offering to cut non-retired teachers’ pensions. The budget shortfall for the Chicago Public Schools system is estimated at \$1 billion. Unfunded pension liabilities for CPS teachers currently sit at \$9 billion.

CTU Vice President and ISO member Jesse Sharkey claimed, “Rahm in 2011 is not Rahm in 2015. He really had to get off his high horse to win. And I think that, as his campaign has shown, there are ways he can act less imperious that can make his life easier.”

American Federation of Teachers national president Randi Weingarten commented, “This will be the threshold issue. Will he be...the man who said he could change? Or will he go back to vintage Rahm?”

These remarks underscore the pretense by the AFT and CTU officials that it is the mayor’s leadership style—whether he will work with the unions to implement cuts—and not any fundamental differences in policies on worker rights, retirement benefits, or the rebuilding and expansion of the decrepit public education system.

Teachers and other city workers must view this as a sharp warning that the unions are preparing to sabotage their struggles as they did in the one-week teachers strike in 2012, which the CTU called off abruptly, paving the way for Emanuel to push through the closure of 50 schools and the elimination of more than a thousand jobs.



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