

# African American Liberation and the Struggle for Socialism

National oppression and class exploitation are at the root of racist state violence

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*A tremendous series of mass demonstrations across the United States, Canada and the world since last summer against racist violence and police brutality has shaken the corridors of the ruling class. Hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets from Missouri and California to Boston, Toronto, London and New York City.*

The U.S. government and ruling class has persistently refused to respond to the demands for justice for Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Aiyana Stanley Jones and the hundreds of other African Americans who have fallen victim to police violence over the last several years. Where are the editorials denouncing law-enforcement use of lethal force against the nationally oppressed and the judicial impunity of the legal apparatus of the state?

In the State of the Union address (SOTU) delivered by President Barack Obama on Jan. 20, he only mentioned the plight of African American youth facing police terrorism in passing. Obama said rightly that the parents of African American youth are often worried when their children face scrutiny by the law-enforcement agents across the country. In the next breathe he said that the families of cops are also concerned about the safety of personnel who work in police departments.

This is of course comes down on the side of the state. How can one say that the dangers facing the oppressed are somehow equal to those who act as surrogates of the ruling class? What this means is that the African American people are on their own as far as defending themselves against state violence.

Information was leaked later in the week indicating that the U.S. Justice Department would not file criminal charges against Darren Wilson, the white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri who killed 18-year-old unarmed Michael Brown on Aug. 9 of last year. Despite numerous eyewitness accounts, videotapes of the immediate aftermath of the shooting, the months-long outrage expressed by the African American people and their allies, there will unlikely be any legal actions taken against the cop responsible for this crime.

There was some discussion about an ongoing investigation into the police department in Ferguson. However, we should not place any real faith in such investigations because in most cases they result in the exoneration of the police and the further criminalization of the victims.

This was the case with Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York, where he was accused by the

media of selling cigarettes on the streets. Nonetheless, they never mentioned whether any cigarettes were found on his person after his killing.

Whether there were any or not is irrelevant since when does possession of cigarettes, which are legal in the U.S., warrant a death sentence by agents of the state? Tamir Rice was a 12-year-old child playing in a public park in Cleveland and was gunned down because someone called 9-1-1 indicating that people were frightening by a youngster playing with a toy gun.

By the time the call had been relayed by the police dispatcher to a squad car it was “a Black man with a gun in the park.” When the officer emerged from the police cruiser it took less than two seconds for him to fire into the body of Rice. Since this vicious killing no charges have been filed against the police and they remain free while a child has been buried.

What Obama did talk about was the attempts to have Congress provide further public resources to escalate the renewed war in Iraq and Syria, ostensibly against the so-called Islamic State. As a spokesperson for the Pentagon he wants the working people of this country to fund yet another “Iraqi army and rebel army in Syria.” Nevertheless, he never mentions what happened to the previous surrogate Iraqi army and rebels in Syria.

It was the U.S. and its allies which created the conditions for the emergence of the Islamic State. A proxy war against Syria since 2011 has caused tremendous dislocation and damage not only to Syria but other regional states. The U.S. through successive administrations during this century has slaughtered millions throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.

These foreign policies have been total disasters for the oppressed nations in these regions as well as people around the world. Inside the U.S., we have seen the impact of runaway Pentagon budgets on the cities like Detroit.

Obama in the SOTU address said in essence that “America was back.” The question is: back to what? We know that wages have actually gone backwards over the last three-and-a-half decades. The prison industrial complex has grown by at least 500 percent. More African Americans are in prison than in colleges and universities. Moreover, there are no programs or even policy discussions on how to alleviate these social problems, which have profound political implications.

#### Detroit: A Lesson in the Ravages of Modern-day Capitalism

What does the brutal police repression of African American and Latinos communities have to do with the economic devastation caused by the banks in the city of Detroit? If we look at the history of Detroit we see clearly that the use of law-enforcement’s brutal tyranny has been a hallmark of the oppressive apparatus of the state.

Since the existence of the African community in Detroit the police have been used to suppress the people. The first popularly-known rebellion among African Americans in Detroit in 1833 arose out of the efforts of white slave catchers who wanted to kidnap and re-enslave people who had taken refuge in the city from Kentucky.

Later in 1943, police operated alongside white mobs to terrorize the African American community during World War II. In 1967, a police raid on a business establishment on 12th

Street sparked the largest urban rebellion up until that time.

In the aftermath of the 1967 rebellion, police violence escalated. In 1971, the Stop the Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS) units went on to the streets killing 33 people over a two year period, with 31 of them being African American. The rise of the Coleman Young administration grew out of the anti-police brutality struggle in Detroit during 1971-73.

Although police violence against the people seemed to decline during the Young administration, the murder of Malice Green on Nov. 5, 1992, pointed to an ongoing problem. This came in the aftermath of the Rodney King Rebellions in Los Angeles and other cities across North America.

The second “black administration” under Dennis Archer set out to repudiate the legacy of the Detroit struggle since the pre-Civil War era. Police violence against the people escalated and it became the undoing of the Archer administration. Some of the gains of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements were reversed by the racist state government, with the destruction of Recorder’s Court, the abolition of municipal residency requirements, the changing of property tax foreclosure laws and the imposition of the casinos and new stadia which were championed as the salvation of the city.

We know today that these initiatives fostered by the corporate community, the banks and their puppets in city government failed miserably. The once-championed casino tax revenue wound up as a major source of contention during the bankruptcy hearings. Mike Ilitch and his billionaire empire came right back to the poor and working people of Detroit during 2014 to extort millions more to construct yet another massive prestige project that is now destroying the old Cass Corridor and creeping into the University Cultural District, now dubbed as “Midtown.”

With the corporate media serving as cheerleaders for the rich, it is important that we escalate the distribution of our newspaper, Workers World, in Detroit. Someone has to get an alternative revolutionary analysis out among the people that uncovers the lies, ruling class propaganda and psychological warfare being waged against the people every single day through the daily press and television news stations.

They say that the bankruptcy worked, but for who? Tens of thousands of City of Detroit retirees and their families have been robbed of their healthcare programs and billions in their pension funds. The reputed “shedding of seven billion in debt” is taken directly from the pensioners in contravention to the Michigan state constitution which the federal bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes arbitrarily “impaired.” This all was a plot by the banks and corporations to set the workers back decades and to provide even more money to the rich.

No challenge was made by the Duggan administration or the City Council to “clawback” the \$177 million in putative “consultancy fees” for the illegal and contrived bankruptcy. All of these entities work at the pleasure of the ruling class. They deliberately allow the workers and oppressed to be expropriated of their meagre wealth consisting of jobs, pensions, homes and communities. The false “comeback” of Detroit is a fraudulent swindle that must be exposed and opposed by people.

Moreover, we must illustrate how none of this is working for the people. Just recently, in the post-election period of 2014, the State of Michigan, it is now said, is facing a \$325 million deficit derived from over \$500 million in shortfalls due to the policy of not taxing

corporations. I believe the situation is much deeper than this and what was revealed in the Detroit News and Free Press recently is just the tip of the iceberg.

According to the Detroit News on Jan. 16,

“An unidentified business cashed in two state tax credits worth \$224 million last month — helping plunge the state’s general fund budget into a deficit and setting off alarm bells inside Gov. Rick Snyder’s administration. Just two weeks into his second term, Snyder is facing a \$325 million midyear shortfall that his budget director says will result in reduced government services and potential layoffs.”

This article continues noting

“The cost of employer-luring tax credits — handed out largely under the prior administration of Democrat Jennifer Granholm — is coming into focus this year as Snyder prepares a 2016 fiscal year budget with \$532 million less revenue than was expected eight months ago. It is also casting a shadow over his Tuesday State of the State speech. Next year’s revenue decline is due in large part to \$351 million in additional tax credit refunds to businesses for which the Snyder administration is budgeting.”

Even larger figures were revealed by

“The nonpartisan Senate Fiscal Agency’s analysis showing that an additional \$1.6 billion in unredeemed tax credits has been awarded to businesses since Snyder took office in 2011. Tax credits expected to be used total \$4.9 billion, a figure that has grown \$3.2 billion since 2011, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.”

One legislative politician was quoted as saying “I find it convenient that two months after the election that we now found out ... there’s this explosion in tax credits that are beyond those of the last administration,” according to Rep. Sam Singh, D-East Lansing.....

“For the current fiscal year, business tax credits are expected to deplete the state’s general fund by \$681 million, \$252 million more than state budget officials estimated last May, according to the Treasury Department. In December, a single firm redeemed two tax credits worth \$224 million, said Terry Stanton, Treasury Department spokesman. By law, state officials cannot disclose the name of the taxpayer.”

The most outrageous aspect of this report is that the corporate media is not filing Freedom of Information Requests (FOIA) demanding to know who these firms are. After these initial reports, the bank-directed press has been silent on this issue.

Furthermore, the Detroit Free Press reported also on Jan. 16 that “Michigan residents can expect unspecified cuts in services as the state tries to address a projected deficit of about \$325 million in the state’s general fund for 2015,” Budget Director John Roberts said Friday. ‘There are going to be real reductions in services,’ Roberts told reporters after officials

reached a consensus on revenue estimates. 'I can't sit here and say yes or no to layoffs' of state employees, he said, and it hasn't been determined what specific services or departments will be affected."

In this same report it is saying that "Friday's (Jan. 16) revised estimates also pose a problem for the 2015-16 budget Gov. Rick Snyder is to unveil Feb. 11. Net general fund revenues for the 2016 fiscal year are now projected to come in \$532 million lower than officials estimated when they last held a revenue conference, in May. Snyder will address budget fixes for both fiscal years on Feb. 11, Roberts said."

Nevertheless, there are no intentions to hold these corporations and their benefactors in the state legislature and gubernatorial offices accountable for the decision to turn over billions of dollars to the rich while cutting meager social benefits, education, pensions, jobs and municipal services. In Detroit all areas of the public services and educational sector have been eviscerated.

The public transportation system in Detroit and throughout region is abysmal with irregular service, crowded buses, which pose a health and safety danger. The People Mover derails downtown during the auto show with barely a whimper from the lickspittle corporate media.

The Detroit Free Press stresses that "Snyder also signed into law a controversial bill that limits the ability of the Treasury Department to hold corporate officers personally liable for the unpaid taxes of corporations. That law is expected to reduce state revenues by about \$295 million over the next three years, of which about \$165 million will impact the general fund, the state's main checking account. Snyder said Thursday (Jan. 15) he has no misgivings about any of those cuts. He said the MBT tax credits 'would be a problem whether we had a different tax system or not.' Sen. Dave Hildenbrand, R-Lowell, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said he's not overly concerned about the projected deficits. All departments can likely make some cuts to help the state balance its 2015 budget, said Hildenbrand, who also wouldn't rule out using surpluses in the School Aid Fund to ease the picture by re-allocating some general fund dollars that currently go toward school-related expenses. 'I don't get into finger-pointing,' Hildenbrand said. 'I'm more about finding a solution.'"

Well we know what those "solutions" will be. They will be what they always are: that is more austerity and repression for the working class and the oppressed.

We must demand that these corporations and politicians be forced to answer for their theft of billions in public funds from the working people of Michigan. The false notion of three percent growth in the state economy and the reduction in the unemployment rate is a ruse to conceal the actual rate of increasing profits for the corporations who pay little taxes at the expense of the majority of people in the state.

### The Water and Housing Questions is a Manifestation of Capitalism

Why is the corporate-oriented city administration and governor ordering the shut-offs of tens of thousands of household water services and forcing hundreds of thousands more out of their homes due to unnecessary tax foreclosures?

These attacks on water services which reached its apex last summer were an integral part of the restructuring as said by an aide to former emergency manager Kevyn Orr. There was

no reason to engage in such actions only to terrorize and drive even more people out of the city. The corporate clients such as the billionaire Illitch and their ilk owed hundreds of thousands in arrears yet they were not terminated.

The whole process was designed also to create the conditions for the regionalization of the system and its eventual privatization. With the presence of Veolia Corporation is a clear indication that there is much more to this effort. It was reported in the Detroit Free Press that water rates could increase by 14 percent for those living in the suburbs.

If the notion that regionalization would benefit the majority white suburbs at the expense of the city residents, this myth is crashing into a contrasting realization. It also illustrates that by not addressing the major question of the interest rate swaps that have ripped \$537 million out of the DWSD system over the last two years is a disastrous policy that will blow up in the faces of Duggan and his cohorts.

The contradiction is that the water shut-offs exposed the real agenda behind emergency management, bankruptcy and the imposition of the Duggan administration. This struggle continues with the filing of an appeal by the legal team to continue to challenge these human rights violations in the courts. However, the movement must also take on a political character by challenging Duggan and his bosses who are promoting the fabricated narrative that Detroit is coming back. Detroit is not coming back for its majority.

Overall conditions are worsening while small businesses are still closing as people face lay-offs in both the private and public sectors. The schools will suffer even further when the impact of the tax revenue transfers to the rich is rationalized by the state government and local municipalities.

On the housing front our demand for a general moratorium on foreclosures and evictions is just as relevant today as it was eight years ago. The banks that are responsible for the 75,000 foreclosures in the first decade of the 21st century have not been held responsible for the havoc they created.

The federal government through the Congress and the Justice Department has acknowledged the role of the banks by reaching consent judgments, levying fines and the limited prosecutions of some executives. However, overall these financial institutions were in fact rewarded for their transgressions through multi-trillion dollar bail-outs since 2008. The federal government in Detroit endorsed the emergency management and bankruptcy of the city in contravention of Civil Rights laws supposedly guaranteeing the right to due process and equal protection. The Voting Act was blatantly disregarded when voters in Michigan in Nov. 2012 struck down emergency management only to have it re-instituted by the dictatorial state government.

Today we are facing 62,000 tax foreclosures in Detroit. This is taking place despite the hundreds of millions sitting in Lansing for the "Hardest Hit" program that is instead being used to drive even more people from their homes and communities. We must demand that these funds are released and all of the foreclosures be immediately halted.

What have foreclosures done for the city? All we need to do is drive or walk around most neighborhoods in Detroit. The housing stock has been destroyed due to the role of the banks, utility companies, the water department and errant politicians.



Last year amid much public hype, Mike Duggan accompanied by City Council President Brenda Jones appeared before media outlets saying they were launching a program to auction abandoned homes beginning in the area surrounding Marygrove College on the northwest side. These efforts are backed up by the illegal quasi-governmental agency known as the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA). This agency works with the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force headed by Dan Gilbert who hired a mapping firm and a team of investigators to target every single home in the city for evaluation.

Yet this auction program was doomed to be dead in the water. An initial project to transfer over 6,200 so-called abandoned homes to a private developer collapsed due to problems associated with the ownership of these structures being in supposed public hands.

Even the few hundreds homes that have been auctions have not been rehabilitated due to the ongoing predatory character of the banking institutions. The new homeowners are not able to get financing for the refurbishing of the structures.

In an article published in the Detroit News on Jan. 5, it states that "A home auction program launched amid great fanfare in May has hit some snags as buyers struggle with financing in what's been a dismal housing market in the city. Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan set out with the goal of auctioning around 400 abandoned homes by the end of 2014 and met it, with a final tally of 394 on Dec. 31."

However, this article continues "seven months into the program, figures show that sales had closed on just over a third of the properties, 37 others were delayed, and several dozen had fallen through, according to the Detroit Land Bank Authority. Of the properties auctioned, 295 had bidders who made legal disclosures and signed purchase agreements. Buyers had closed on only 138 properties."

Mind you these are figures supplied by the DLBA and the corporate media who are no friends of the people in Detroit. The mere paucity of these numbers in relationship to the over 80,000 abandoned and vacant structures in the city indicates that these initiatives are designed merely for public relations purposes.

The same report says

"Circumstances vary, but the vast majority of non-closings are attributed to financing issues, and in some cases, buyer's remorse, says Craig Fahle, a spokesman for the land bank. Some sales remain delayed, but are intended to go through, he added. The auction process, Fahle says, is intended to be an economic driver, not a long-term strategy for Detroit."

"It's important that people recognize that the auctions are one tool in a big tool kit to help stabilize neighborhoods and rebuild the value there. It takes that kind of a kick-start when the market is as dysfunctional as Detroit has become," the former local NPR-affiliate news announcer told the paper.

Continuing the Detroit News notes that

"The figures come as the City Council is expected to take up a resolution as early as next month to authorize Detroit's Planning and Development Department to transfer 30,000 vacant residential properties to the land bank,

which would bring its inventory up to more than 70,000 for its various programs.... Part of the problem rests with the appraisal process, since comparisons are being based on homes sold nearby, often times at values that are disproportionate. That, Fahle said, is the primary reason that some deals have fallen through. To address it, the land bank is working closely with lenders and independent appraisers. It also stepped up efforts to educate prospective buyers on financing and mortgage options and to encourage responsible bidding.”

We all know that this is complete rubbish. The housing stock in Detroit has been rendered worthless as a result of the banks and to go back to these same institutions to seek financing for rehabilitation is counter-intuitive.

Later in the Detroit News article it attempts to clean up this fiasco by suggesting that the program is only in its infancy and has to correct these problems. The reality is that this program is doomed to failure like other such projects because it relies on the same capitalist methods of operation that drove the city into ruin.

This failed program of seizure, demolition and auctioning should be condemned outright by housing activists. The initiatives must be stopped immediately and a more rationalize plan for reconstruction be discussed and developed.

The collapse of this auctioning system combined with the tens of thousands of tax foreclosures connotes further doom for the people of Detroit. The Duggan-Snyder-Gilbert so-called “recovery and rebuilding” program for the city will inevitably, if not halted, drive hundreds of thousands more African Americans and others from the city of Detroit.

#### Why the “Plan of Adjustment” Is Failing

How can the ruling class backed up by the courts justify the attacks on retirees and the wholesale theft of public assets, while the public sector is being privatized with billions of dollars being turned over to banks and corporations under the guise of an illegal bankruptcy that has further institutionalized national oppression and economic inequality in majority African American cities in Michigan?

The answer to this question lies within the exigencies of the capitalist system in its present phase. Objectively the wealthiest corporations have reaped profits at the expense of an expanding majority including the nationally oppressed and the working class as a whole.

An illegal implementation of austerity provides no solution to the crisis impacting the people of Detroit and the state of Michigan. Gov. Snyder’s state of the union address on Jan. 20 did not address the real problems facing people throughout the state including workers, youth, retirees, women and the oppressed nations.

His outright misrepresentations of the economic situation in the state will not shield public and private sector workers from further lay-offs and impoverishment. As the bogus “plan of adjustment” imposed by the federal courts in Detroit continues to implode, the ruling class interests and their surrogates in government will have no other choice than to cut salaries, resources and services.

The theft of retiree pensions and public assets may not be complete. What will stop the politicians and courts from coming back to steal even more of the deferred wages and



municipal wealth from the people? The only force that can stop them is an organized, mobilized and militant movement pointing to the source of the problem and determined to challenge the ruling class for control of the future of the city and the state.

This movement must link up with other municipalities throughout the country that are facing similar difficulties. The escalation in repressive violence by the police is clearly connected with the overall economic crisis.

In Ferguson, African Americans face massive unemployment, poverty that is reinforced by law-enforcement use of lethal force along with judicial impunity. On average, Ferguson households have two outstanding warrants making the majority of people in the St. Louis suburb subjected to arrest, excessive fines and detention.

The only solution to these problems is the adoption of an anti-capitalist program that guides the mass movement. There is no solution found within the capitalist system that breeds racism, national oppression and social dislocation.

Whether the narrative is coming from the White House and the Congress or the state and local governments, none of it makes any sense to the growing majority in U.S. society. The wealth generated by the working class must be taken in order to ensure the survival and prosperity of the people.

We cannot allow the forces responsible for the crisis to dictate the terms under which the problems should be solved. The capitalist have no solution to the crisis of the working class and the oppressed.

Reading any editorial page or news story from the corporate media gives one clear indications that these problems of joblessness, underemployment, poverty and homelessness are not even being addressed. The same failed policies of “trickledown economics” are still being advanced, a holdover from the Reagan-era of the 1980s.

What we have seen are more false promises and failed initiatives. Building new sports arenas, restaurants, hotels and bars, provide no prospects for salvation among the working class and nationally oppressed. As Dr. King said in 1967-68, once you tear down the segregated facilities, where does the money come from to visit these non-segregated businesses?

Dr. King worked during the last year of his life to end poverty and imperialist war. We must continue his efforts for a society and world where people come before profits and the masses control their destiny based upon the needs of the majority.

*Note: The following address was delivered at a public meeting on Jan. 24, 2015 in Detroit. The forum was sponsored by Workers World Party Detroit branch.*

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