

Capitalist Development and Community Demolitions in Detroit

Ruling class interests continue the underdevelopment of majority African American municipality

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A white corporate-imposed mayor of the City of Detroit has been projected by the mainstream media as a savior of the majority African American populated municipality.

Although there have been enormous problems since the ascendancy of Mike Duggan through a write-in campaign during late 2013 while the city was under an illegal emergency management system and bankruptcy, no one who relies on the television stations which spew out ruling class propaganda will hear of the profound contradictions plaguing the area.

Nonetheless, if people seek out the information through various newspaper and social media accounts it would become quite clear that most residents of the city are facing impoverishment and economic uncertainty. Overall unemployment in the state of Michigan has risen sharply in the last quarter even though the national jobless rate is far less than 4%.

One of the latest schemes of the billionaire ruling interests and their agents is the proposal announced by Duggan to issue \$200 million in bonds specifically designed to raise monies for the demolition of even more vacant edifices in the city. The stated objective is to eliminate all vacant homes by 2024.

What such news reports ignore is the systematic redirecting of hundreds of millions in Federal Hardest Hit Funds (HHF) from their intended purpose. The allocations grew out of the government bailout of the banks and insurance companies beginning in 2008-2009. These HHFs were supposed to assist the hundreds of thousands of people in the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan facing mortgage and property tax foreclosures.

During the administration of President Barack Obama, a coterie of purported political leaders, officials and capitalists went to the White House to make a request that rule changes should be implemented to focus on demolition as opposed to any minimum program of stabilization. Rather than restore neighborhood devastated by the crisis in contemporary capitalism, the decisions made by the ruling class sought to destroy and drive out even more people from the city.

An irrational notion that demolishing homes and apartment buildings would translate into economic development has proven to be false. Blight in Detroit has worsened while the much championed rising property values only served to force more African Americans and

working class people from the city. Once a majority home-owning city, Detroit is now a place where renters outnumber those who own the residences where they live.

Demolition, Not Development

Not surprisingly, the demolition program channeled through the quasi-governmental agency known as the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) has been riddled with corruption and waste of federal funds. Recently, the city administration stated it would take control of demolition efforts undoubtedly insuring the continuation of graft and inefficiency.

Most of the so-called “development” in Detroit is occurring in the downtown and midtown areas where tax captures and other publically-subsidized prestige projects are presented to the people as “progress.” Dan Gilbert, the owner of Quicken Loans, a notorious usurious enterprise which dominates the discourse on urban planning, is projected by the corporate media as yet another paragon of economic virtue. Gilbert, who suffered a stroke in late May, is a major culprit in the current plight of the city.

The family of the late Mike Illitch constitutes a major problem as well as represented in the cajoling of a subservient majority on the Detroit City Council to sign off on the District Detroit plan where \$324 million in tax dollars were utilized to build a new sports arena complex, which also has restaurants, shops and bars. This was to be only the first step in a broader “development plan” which would see gentrified housing complexes, shops and other businesses to be frequented by a transplanted largely white clientele along with tourists.



Detroit Demonstration at Wayne County Treasurer on Sept. 5, 2017

After the arena was built and opened in 2017, nothing else has occurred. All of the vacant land in the areas formerly known as the Cass Corridor remained run down. What actually exist in the area are scattered parking lots for the patrons of the Little Caesar’s complex which is the venue for the local sport teams: the Red Wings and Pistons. The Illitch family also owns the Tigers baseball team which plays home games at the nearby Comerica Park. Right next to Comerica Park is Ford Field, the home to the Lions, owned by the automotive

family which bares its name.

All of the promises made over the last 25 years in relationship to the building of stadia, gambling casinos, hotels, the repurposing of buildings for apartment dwellers and condo owners, has not benefited the people of Detroit. African Americans, retirees, working class and poor residents of the downtown and Cass Corridor districts have been largely displaced.

Moreover, many of those who have moved into these areas harbor no long term commitments to the city. As soon as the money eviscerates and the start-up firms fail, these people will leave as well. This pattern was well underway under the administrations of former Mayors Dennis Archer and Kwame Kilpatrick. Then of course the Great Recession arrived shattering these illusions.

Alternative Development Planning and Implementation Needed

While communities are being bulldozed, disinvested and neglected, billions in public monies are being funneled into the downtown and midtown districts despite the lack of profitability and prospects for sustainable growth. Why should these prestige projects seek elongated profitability when the masses are the guarantors of their wealth?

These automotive companies, service providers, financial institutions and large insurance firms actually created the conditions for the near collapse of the economy during the latter years of the first decade of this century. A host of predatory loan schemes backed by insurance companies and government entities proved to be unsound requiring the tax dollars and savings of working people to rescue them from their own insatiable need for mega-profits and administrative domination.

Only a people-centered program of development can address the current crises. Housing, education, municipal services, environmental quality, universal healthcare and independent media are prerequisites for genuine growth and development. Detroit cannot be rebuilt when the school system which has been looted for the last two decades by the State of Michigan and corporate entities through the interference of governance institutions and tax captures, remains enforce as policy priorities. No real revitalization can take place when hundreds of thousands of residents are daily threatened with eviction, water and utility shut-offs, school closings, mass lay-offs, declining real wages and inadequate public services.

The city cannot raise the standard of living for its majority African American population when the superstructure is compliant with the disenfranchisement and super-exploitation of the people. Improvements to the neighborhoods, educational institutions and access to adequate incomes would represent a beginning point for reconstruction and empowerment of the working class.

Such a program would necessitate an independent political character for the African American majority and its allies. Both the Democratic and Republican parties are responsible for the crises within the capitalist system today. Under both regimes in the last four decades to start with, African Americans have lost household wealth, personal incomes and community institutions including schools, food and consumer goods outlets, etc. The prison population has increased by 500 percent encapsulating many African Americans and Latinx people. As the news of declining crime rates proliferate, the repressive apparatus of the state intensifies leading to an epidemic of police killings and brutalization of civilians along with the criminalization of youth by the judicial system.

These problems are not confined to Detroit, although they exist in exaggerated forms. Straight across the United States and indeed the world, urban, suburban and rural communities are being marginalized while the wealth generated from the labor of the people is even more concentrated in the possession of fewer hands.

The military industrial complex marches on uninhibited by the desire for peace and cooperation among peoples. Neither of the ruling class parties speaks to the need to overthrow imperialist militarism. Propaganda targeting the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Republic of Cuba, among many other states, political interests and peoples, are broadcast daily in an effort to enflame pro-war sentiments undergirded by racism, xenophobia and pseudo-national chauvinism.

Within the U.S., the corporate media idolizes the rich while they proceed to take even greater shares of the wealth rightfully belonging to the working people. This is why African Americans, the nationally oppressed as a collective, along with the working masses and poor, need their own political party. A party which can speak in the name of the people based upon its uncompromising positions demanding total freedom, justice, equality and self-determination.

Such a party would be able to form real alliances with international forces desirous of socialist development and global peace. Under these circumstances a genuine development program could revitalize the municipalities and the rural areas.

However, as long as the ruling capitalist class maintains its control over the world economy the status-quo will prevail.

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