

A program to rebuild, not downsize Detroit

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The following statement is being distributed at a series of meetings on Detroit Mayor David Bing's plans to restructure and downsize the city. (See: "Officials seek to prevent discussion at meetings on 'downsizing' of Detroit"). D'Artagnan Collier is the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Michigan State House of Representatives, 9th District, and a member of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs.

The public hearings being held over the next week on proposals to downsize Detroit are a fraud. Under the guise of consulting with the people, Mayor David Bing is moving ahead with plans made behind closed doors by top bankers and corporate CEOs to cut off services and shut down entire neighborhoods.

As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party for the Michigan State Legislature, 9th District, I reject this plan, which will further devastate the lives of working people and the unemployed. Instead of shrinking the city, I call for a massive expansion of public services—education, housing, health care and recreation—and the establishment of a public works program to hire the unemployed at good wages to rebuild the city.

Mayor Bing speaks for the business elite, not the people of Detroit. He served for 20 years on the board of directors of DTE Energy, which wants to drastically shrink the area in which it must provide utility services to the poor, because these services generate little profit. He built his business, Bing Steel, as a contractor for the giant auto companies, which see no reason to pay taxes for public services in a city that they have destroyed through plant closures and mass layoffs.

The claim that shrinking the city is a necessary response to a declining population is a self-serving lie. The population loss is the result of the decades-long attack on the working class and the destruction of jobs, living standards, education and other services. The

further dismantling of the city will not lead to "stronger neighborhoods," but will drive out ever larger segments of the population.

The downsizing policy is also based on the lie that there is "no money" for maintaining, let alone expanding, social services. This comes after trillions of dollars have been handed out to the banks and spent on wars abroad. After securing the interests of the wealthy, the Obama administration—with which the Detroit government is closely allied—is demanding that working people pay through cuts in wages and social services across the country.

The shrinking of Detroit is already well underway. Bing and Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb, working with Education Secretary Arne Duncan, have shut down dozens of schools, citing budget deficits. The devastating wave of fires last week shows that entire parts of the city have already been abandoned, while vital services, such as fire protection, are not available to wide layers of the population.

Now, city officials are planning to shut down as much as 40 square miles of Detroit, more than one quarter of the land surface, and compel residents living in those areas to move. Whether this takes the form of legal buyouts and evictions, as in Poletown, or starving areas of services until residents leave "voluntarily," the effect is the same.

Bing's initial plan, suggested last March, called for demolishing 10,000 homes and using tax foreclosure and eminent domain to seize property from local residents. After this plan aroused widespread opposition, the mayor decided on a slower process involving the pretense of popular consultation.

The essence of the plan is still the same. As City Council President Pro Tem Gary Brown told the *Detroit News*, "This is going to come down to me to one basic issue...identify the winners and the losers. Some neighborhoods are not going to be viable, and we

are going to find ways to give incentives to move people out.” The “winners” will be the wealthy layers of the population, while the “losers” will be the vast majority of working people, already experiencing a 50 percent real unemployment rate and a poverty rate of over 30 percent.

Instead of shrinking Detroit to the level that the corporations can afford, the alternative is to reject the profit system. Working people must fight for a program that starts, not with corporate profits, but with our rights to jobs, decent housing, and the full range of public services needed for modern life—health, education, utilities, public transportation, access to culture. This will require seizing the wealth of the giant corporations and banks, instead of the homes of working people.

Working people need their own organizations to mobilize a fight back. The Socialist Equality Party has established the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS), of which I am a member, to oppose the cruel and criminal practice of giant energy corporations cutting off electricity, gas and other services to poor and working people.

The SEP is leading the fight to mobilize the working class, in Detroit and nationwide, against the social catastrophe produced by the breakdown of American capitalism. We call on working people in Detroit to form committees to fight for these rights, independent of both the Democratic Party and the unions, which have become nothing more than stooges for the big corporations.

We fight to unite all working people—black, white, Latino and Asian, citizen and immigrant, city and suburban—in a common struggle against the profit system and for a socialist future.



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