

Detroit mayor plans to end services to one-third of city

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In a recent press interview Mayor Dave Bing revealed his plans to downsize Detroit by depriving residents living in large swathes of the city of essential services. This effort to drive out the population from one-third of Detroit's total land mass is being billed by the government and the media as a plan to "incentivize" people to relocate rather than "forcing" them.

The supposed incentive is that those who relocate to one of the neighborhoods slated for survival will actually have access to such things as public schools, transportation, fresh water, gas, electricity, and emergency services. Those who remain outside of these seven to nine neighborhoods will go without.

Speaking to the *Detroit Free Press*, Bing stated, "We're going to be encouraging [people] to move and put themselves in a better situation. They are much better moving into a more dense area so that we can provide them with the services they need: that would be water, sewer, lighting, public safety—all of that."

In order to underscore his point, the mayor made clear that those who did not relocate "need to understand that they're not going to get the kind of services they require." He added, "I don't want people to think that, if they hold out, there's going to be a pot full of money somewhere, because there's not." In other words, the city will not provide any financial aid to residents being forced with the choice of losing their homes or living in pre-20th century conditions.

Karen Dumas, a spokeswoman for the mayor's office, further emphasized this point to the *Detroit Free Press*, which reported that she "said the opportunity for a better life in a neighborhood that provided improved city services should encourage people to move and, by itself, provide an incentive."

The fact that the press repeats this nonsense and produces headlines, without even a blush, about the

city's plans, is an indictment of the media and underscores the contempt the entire political establishment has towards the working population and poor residents of the city.

The mayor insists that his plan, which is named the Detroit Works Program, is necessary because of the declining number of people living in the city. Bing maintains that the 2010 census will show that Detroit's population, which in 1950 stood at 2 million, is now between 800,000 and 850,000.

At the time that the census was being taken, the city government did very little to ensure that an accurate count was made, as it intended to use the falling population count as a justification for its downsizing plan. However, even if the mayor's estimates were correct, tens of thousands of people still reside in the neighborhoods that the city intends to cut off from all services.

If put into place, Bing's plans would leave thousands of residents stranded in areas of Detroit. Anyone who does not have the resources to relocate, which would constitute a large portion of the elderly and impoverished citizens of Detroit's decaying neighborhoods, will be made to live in barbaric conditions and essentially left to die. Residents will have no access to clean water, the streets will be clogged with sewage, homes will burn down in fires, and children will be without schooling.

The notion of depriving a city's residents of essential services in order to force out the population brings to mind events from World War II. During the siege of Leningrad, the Nazis blockaded this Soviet city with the aim of driving out and starving the population.

The fact that the mayor of a US city is proposing that similar methods be used to force the relocation of his constituents speaks volumes about the social interests

represented by the government and the decay of American democracy.

In an expression of the profound disdain the Detroit city government has for public sentiment, the mayor's office is refusing to release the full details of its plan. Although it has already identified which neighborhoods it intends to let go to seed, the city will not make this information public until the spring, claiming that its plans are "not final." While Bing's office maintains that it will seek public input in a series of forums held in the coming months, its decision to withhold information about which neighborhoods will be targeted for denial of services is aimed at preventing the growth of public opposition.

The mayor's shutdown plans will likely face a court challenge. It is illegal to deprive certain sections of a city of basic services, while awarding them to another. "It's a general principal of the law that cities are to essentially deal with their population on an equal basis," said Wayne State University Law Professor John Mogk in an interview with the *Detroit Free Press*.

However, Mogk suggested that the mayor's office would try to block any forthcoming legal challenge by insisting that it is more expensive to deliver services to the entire city, rather than to just a small section of it.

Alan Ackerman, a local eminent domain attorney interviewed by the online area news source *Mlive*, indicated that he expects that Detroit will enlist the help of Michigan's incoming Republican governor, Rick Snyder. With the aid of the state legislature, Snyder could push through a law fabricating a legal basis for Bing's plans.

"I think you'll find legislation that puts people on notice that their rights will be limited. The city might look to legislation, which allows a second-system status (...) for these areas where it wants to deactivate full services. They won't become Townships, per se, but they might act more like it in terms of not guaranteeing sewer and water," Ackerman said.

In his December 9 interview with the *Detroit Free Press*, Bing said he anticipates the closest possible relationship with Snyder. "I knew him before, as businesspeople. We're going to be partners. We're going to be joined at the hip," the mayor stated.

The downsizing of Detroit is closely related to plans to create a tax haven in the city, whereby big business,

including auto manufacturing, will be able to take advantage of cheap land, poverty-level wages, and huge tax breaks. The Detroit Regional Chamber, a commercial lobbying organization whose board is made up of leading Michigan business figures, is heavily promoting this idea.

When asked by the *Detroit Free Press* whether he was "open to creating tax free zones in the city," Bing, who is a vocal supporter of President Barack Obama's extension of tax cuts for the wealthy, responded, "Absolutely."

In November, Bing went to Italy to meet with executives at Fiat, which is in partnership with Chrysler, to discuss plans for investment in the Detroit area. According to the *Detroit News*, the mayor was joined during his travels by Toni Griffin, "an urban planner hired by foundations to help with the city's downsizing effort."

The only people who will benefit from the mayor's shutdown plans are big business and the wealthy. The Detroit Works Program has nothing to do with revitalizing the city or restoring it to its once great heights. A genuine program to "bring back" Detroit would entail the creation of a multibillion-dollar public works program to provide people with good-paying jobs and rebuild the city. It would involve significant efforts to attract people back to Detroit's deserted neighborhoods by repairing homes and building new affordable housing. It would demand not the closing of schools, the gutting of social programs, and the termination of utility services, but the allocation of massive funding to meet public needs. The realization of such a program is only possible on the basis of the mobilization of masses of working people, in opposition to the Democrats, the Republicans, and all their backers, against the profit system.



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