

Detroit residents speak out against mass evictions

A campaign team
1 May 2013

Residents of the Henry Street apartments, located in Detroit's Cass Corridor, held a tenants meeting on Sunday to fight the eviction from their homes, slated for May 20.

On April 19, without any warning, residents of the complex were sent a three-sentence letter informing them that the property had been sold and to vacate the premises. They were also given a state of Michigan document to vacate, which is the step prior to eviction. The owner of the buildings, Peter Mercier, told the residents that he had signed an option to sell the buildings a year ago.

There is speculation that the new owner is Little Caesar's billionaire owner Mike Ilitch, and that the buying up of properties in this area of downtown Detroit is part of plans for a \$650 million shopping district and a new arena for his hockey team, the Detroit Red Wings.

The building is largely isolated in an area planned for "renovation" projects that will be spearheaded by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr. Orr was appointed by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder in March and given vast powers to carry out an attack on all sections of the working class throughout the city. Investors like Ilitch and Quicken Loans Chairman Dan Gilbert see the appointment of Orr as an opportunity carry out their plans completely unhindered by legal restraint.

A large percentage of the low-income residents at Henry Street are disabled and elderly, and many have been residents for decades. Some of those who attended the meeting were seeking clarification about the legality of the action. Others wanted to know if their utilities would be shut off.

The original meeting started in a small laundry room in the basement of the building but was moved outside to accommodate the large turnout. Residents stood

outside in the rain to express their opposition to Detroit officials and Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr's efforts to drive the homeless and low-income people out of the city's downtown areas.

"They have said they are going to cut the lights out on May 20," Greg Hawkins said at the meeting. "These are the fears that they are trying to push on us. A lot of this stuff is to scare you into moving."

A worker added, "We do not need a lawyer to have human rights. This is to create fear. We do not have to be out of here by the 20th, I want to state that. That's only the start of the process of eviction. Every last one of us that pays rent will have their day in court. We ask you to stick together because if everybody gets scared and runs, that will lead to a skeleton crew. We've got to stick together."

Following the meeting, supporters of the Socialist Equality Party's mayoral campaign of D'Artagnan Collier spoke to residents about their struggle and the political issues involved. They explained that the SEP was fighting to mobilize the entire working class, independently from the Democratic and Republican Parties, against the emergency manager and the bankers' dictatorship in Detroit.

Local Democratic Party politicians and their supporters, some of whom attended the meeting, have sought to channel growing opposition back behind the City Council and the local political establishment. The corrupt officials who have run Detroit for decades entirely support the attack on workers, seeking only to preserve their own positions in the process.

An older resident said, "I worked as a restaurant worker in the Southwest side of Detroit for many years. I could have been an office worker but enjoyed being able to speak to people every day who came into the restaurant every day. Every worker should have a

yearly raise and programs like SSI [Supplemental Social Security Income for the disabled] and welfare are important to take care of people in society who cannot fend for themselves. Working and poor people are not the problem, and I do not agree with how we are being treated. Most of the residents at our building look after one another, and we need to take a stand against being unfairly evicted.”

Laura, a waitress, and Rachael, 21, raised concerns for the elderly and disabled in the apartments. Laura said, “Someone needs to help the elderly and people who have disabilities here. They don’t have the money or assistance to move at all, let alone by May 20.”

Rachael added, “We are fine. We are looking for a place, but I’m worried about the old folks. How can they save up for a new place?” Her boyfriend, a unionized mixing operator, added, “We have to stick together and keep fighting until all the old people, women, and children are okay.”

Terrence Hubbard has lived in the complex for 16 years and is on disability from a job-related injury. “My feeling is that it starts with Illich going to our state government asking for a stadium to be built. The state government said they didn’t have the money so decided to take the tax payers dollars that was designed to go to the schools to fund Illich’s private business.”

“Illich has millions of dollars. Why would he need to go to the state to get money? I have been here for 16 years, in a bed bug infested apartment. For them not to give us a dime! Whether it is from the landlord, from Illich, or the state government. Some people are saying the government is not involved, but I believe they have their hands in this. To me it is the state government, Illich Holdings, and our landlord Mr. Mercier.”

Another tenant explained, “My situation is that I moved in on March 21. On April 18 I received a notice that I have to move. That letter that the landlord sent us said that he had been in negotiations for a year. He should have notified us a year ago. Then we should have been told the property is going to be sold, and you had an option to move. Not only did I get the apartment, but I also went out and bought new furniture. And I want my money back.”

Onita Diane Gordon is a 21-year military veteran who had been homeless. She has been in the building for three weeks. “They took \$500 from me to move in, and I have been told I am not going to get my security

deposit back. I don’t have the money to move again. The first of the month, even if I have the rent, I still won’t have the security deposit to be able to move. And it is not enough time. I have to pay people to help me move. I have stuff in storage that I can’t afford to get out.”

One worker concluded by saying, “There is something bigger at work than what you see in the Cass Corridor. With recent legislation, right to work, the emergency manager, you have people who are moving back into the city and people are being moved out because their economic status is not good enough.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact