

Stop the mass evictions in Detroit!

D'Artagnan Collier—Socialist Equality Party candidate for Detroit mayor
3 May 2013

As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for mayor of Detroit I call on workers throughout the metropolitan area to defend the tenants of the Henry Street apartments in Cass Corridor who face imminent eviction.

More than 300 people—including low-income families with children, elderly and disabled workers on fixed incomes and many who have lived there for up to 30 years—are being cleared out like animals by wealthy real estate developers.

On April 19, without any warning, residents received a three-sentence letter informing them that the property had been sold and they had to pack up and vacate by May 20.

The new owner of the building is being kept secret, but residents suspect it is Little Caesar's billionaire owner Mike Ilitch, who is buying up properties in the area in order to build a new \$650 million shopping district and sports arena for his hockey team, the Detroit Red Wings.

After public outrage, the current owner gave residents a "reprieve" until the end of June. This means little, however, to the residents who have little or no resources to relocate. Rents are rising in the area, and there is a shortage of decent, affordable housing increasingly because of the gentrification of downtown.

What are the residents to do? To the wealthy parasites determined to remake Detroit in their own interests, this is of no concern. Poverty, homelessness, destitution—this is the future they hold out for hundreds of thousands.

The inhumane treatment of the Henry Street tenants is part of a brutal class policy headed by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr. Orr is a hatchet man for the banks and wealthy bondholders who have looted the city, along with multi-billionaires like Ilitch and Quickens Loan's Dan Gilbert. Their plan is to buy up properties in downtown at rock bottom prices and profit

enormously from the infusion of public funds.

The "revitalization" of Detroit, hailed by the media, has nothing to do with improving the conditions of workers and poor people. On the contrary, Orr has been tasked with gutting whatever is left of city services, slashing the jobs, wages and pensions of city workers and privatizing public resources like water, sanitation and transportation. Whatever can be sucked out of working people in this manner will be handed over to the bondholders and banks like UBS and Bank of America.

The Henry Street evictions are a test case for this strategy. Downtown up to the New Center area and select neighborhoods will receive resources. The "undesirables" will be driven out while poor neighborhoods are essentially shut down. This plan is supported by Mayor David Bing, the City Council, and Governor Rick Snyder.

The same corporate forces driving out the Henry Street residents are demanding that teachers, firefighters and other city workers accept pay cuts and layoffs. Retiree pensions and health care are on the chopping block. Auto workers' wages have been slashed in half to satisfy the insatiable demands of the corporate executives and their Wall Street backers.

To oppose the dictates of the corporations and banks, the working class needs its own program!

As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate and a city worker, I am running in these elections to unite all sections of the working class—employed and unemployed, black and white, young people and retirees, in the city and in the suburbs—on the basis of a program that represents *our interests*. This program begins with the insistence that everyone has basic social rights. These include the right to decent and affordable housing, and the right not to be thrown out on the streets. They include the right to a job with a livable income. They include the right to high quality

public education, health care and retirement. And they include the right to culture and leisure time.

Not only does the entire political establishment, Democrats and Republicans, insist that workers do not have these rights, they demand that whatever workers have must be taken away. All of them, from President Obama and Congress in Washington, to Rick Snyder and Andy Dillon in Lansing, to Bing, Orr and the Detroit City Council, insist workers must pay for the crisis of the capitalist system.

The corporations and banks, along with their political representatives, have used the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, a crisis caused by the greed and criminality of the corporate and financial elite, as an opportunity to slash wages, wipe out millions of public and private sector jobs and go after whatever is left of past social gains, including Medicare and Social Security.

The SEP rejects the lie that there is no money for the most essential necessities of modern life, even as Wall Street and the auto executives are doing better than ever and trillions are squandered on endless wars.

To defend the rights of working people, immediate measures must be taken. This means first of all kicking out the emergency manager, an unelected official who has been given dictatorial powers. However, no confidence can be placed in the corrupt officials that have run Detroit for decades. The City Council and mayor must be replaced by a council of workers, based on democratic workers committees established in every workplace and neighborhood.

The debts owed to the banks on Wall Street must be declared null and void. To meet the pressing needs of working people, I call for an immediate wealth tax of 90 percent on the top 1 percent, an elementary measure that will make available vast resources to construct affordable housing and rebuild Detroit.

Nothing can be accomplished so long as economic and political power remains in the hands of a tiny section of the population. The SEP calls for the expropriation of the ill-gotten wealth of the financial elite and the nationalization of the banks and major corporations under the democratic control of the working class.

To take this fight forward, I urge you to support my campaign and become involved today.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact