

SEP campaigners oppose Detroit home evictions

A campaign team
24 May 2013

Supporters of Socialist Equality Party Detroit mayoral candidate D'Artagnan Collier spoke this week to residents facing eviction at the Henry Street apartments and students at nearby Cass Tech High School about the struggle workers and young people face in the city. Campaigners urged workers and youth to attend next week's emergency meeting to advance a workers program to answer the crisis in Detroit.

On April 19, residents of the Henry Street apartments were given a three-sentence letter informing them that the complex has been sold and to vacate the premise by May 20. Senior citizens at Griswold apartments in downtown Detroit are also facing eviction.

While the identity of the new landlord is being kept secret, residents suspect it may be Mike Ilitch, the billionaire owner of Little Caesar's Pizza who has been buying up properties in the area to build a new \$650 million shopping district and a sports arena for his hockey team, the Detroit Red Wings.

After public outrage, the residents of Henry Street were given a "reprieve" until the end of June. This delay in no way helps those who do not have the resources to move. "We have over 250 people living on this block," Ralph, a military veteran who has been living in the complex for 8 years, said. "We have people who have been living here for 20 to 30 years, and some of them are on life support. How can they expect them to move?"

The evictions are part of a brutal class policy directed by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, which is aimed at restructuring the city to benefit wealthy real estate developers, bondholders and corporate executives. Appointed by Republican governor Rick Snyder, the unelected emergency manager has virtually dictatorial powers to shut down city services, slash the wages and pensions of municipal workers and sell off public

assets. Last week, Orr released his plans outlining these attacks, after which he declared there would be no "plebiscite" or "negotiations" on the terms of his plan.

The gentrification of Detroit—which has been hailed as "revitalization" by the corporate, political and media establishment—has nothing to do with improving the conditions of workers and those living there. The evictions at Henry Street are being used as a test case to rid the city of low-income "undesirables" either by jacking rents up to impossibly high levels or in the case of the poorest neighborhoods shunned by investors, cutting off essential services like public schools, lighting and fire protection and essentially shutting down whole portions of the city.

Diane, a Henry Street tenant, said no services were being provided to help residents move. "They aren't giving us the resources we need. We've got until June but we still don't have enough time. If we had three to four months maybe we could find a new place."

She added, "The Red Cross came by and said that they would help, but after I went down to their office and filled out all their forms, they told me that there's no money."

Another tenant expressed his determination to fight against this inhumane treatment. "They didn't have to go through all this, they knew a year ago about this. There's a lot of veterans here, we're probably going to stay until a judge kicks us out."

When asked about the emergency manager, Ralph noted, "Kevyn Orr is a dictator. This sprang out of the blue. They don't care about us, they just want to build a new hockey stadium."

Supporters of D'Artagnan Collier also spoke to students at Cass Tech High School, which is just across the street from the apartments. None of the students and parents knew about the evictions. Campaigners

explained the connection between the struggle of the apartment residents and public school students and teachers who have faced years of attacks.

Michigan's previous Democratic governor, Jennifer Granholm, appointed an emergency manager over the schools in 2009. The district is in the process of closing two-thirds of its public schools, including another 28 public schools by 2016.

Maya Parnell, a high school senior, said, "What the people of Detroit don't realize is that outsiders are coming in looking to make a profit off of what we already have. The money is going outside the city, it's going to the rich. Not a dime is coming back to us, we have to fight against this."

Leshay Uddin, also a senior, asked, "I want to know what happened with all the material left in our old building? We're still using the same textbooks we used then but there aren't enough copies. Why did they leave the old books there?"



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