

NAACP, UAW hold Martin Luther King Jr. rally to promote Democratic Party

E.P. Bannon, Richard Vargas
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The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the United Auto Workers (UAW) held a rally in downtown Detroit over the weekend, on the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 Detroit march. The UAW and the NAACP used the event in an attempt to channel the mass hostility to emergency manager Kevyn Orr behind the Democratic Party.

Orr is currently carrying out a slash-and-burn policy in Detroit, aimed at ripping up pensions and health care, slashing wages, and selling off city assets to pay wealthy bondholders. He has the support of the entire political establishment, including local Democrats, who have presided over the dismantling of the city for decades.

The march went down Woodward Ave, ending at Hart Plaza right next to the GM headquarters in downtown Detroit. The stage was set at the far end of the plaza. The immediate area in front of the stage was cordoned off exclusively for NAACP officials and union bureaucrats. The area was lined with metal barricades and heavily guarded with police and marshals, prohibiting those attending from coming within some fifty feet of the stage.

The speakers feigned opposition to the devastating cuts imposed on Detroit while making cynical calls to vote Democrat. President of the Detroit NAACP Reverend Wendell Anthony began by addressing the crowd. Anthony proclaimed that the rally had “defied the odds,” adding that “in the midst of economic turmoil and social injustice, and political repression, that the 'Dream' lives on.” He then told the crowd that “marching doesn't mean anything” unless they registered more voters and mobilized them behind the Democratic Party.

He then introduced UAW International President Bob

King, whom Anthony referred to as the union's “fearless leader.” King, who has forced plant closures, mass layoffs as well as wage and pension cuts, began with a very telling statement: “In life, you get what you're willing to accept.”

King continued by praising “African-Americans, Latino, labor, women, immigrant rights, and the LGBT community” for re-electing President Obama, while blaming the social crisis in Detroit on workers who did not vote Democrat. “We are suffering the consequences for not voting,” he said.

Mayor David Bing, the next speaker, was greeted with boos throughout the crowd, an indication of the alienation of the city establishment. Accepting the de-industrialization of Detroit, he exclaimed, “We're going to bring this city back whether there's an emergency manager or not.”

As he continued, “Detroit will never again have 1.8 million people—” he was drowned out by workers shouting “Why not?” and “We want 2 million people!”

The rally concluded with a short speech from Reverend Jesse Jackson. He declared that the city of Detroit was in “a state of emergency,” and told the crowd “it's time to take a stand and fight back” by supporting the Democrats.

SEP supporters spoke with workers and youth while handing out the latest copies of the Detroit Worker Newsletter. Workers discussed a broad range of social and political issues. One worker who had attended the rally spoke on the social crisis in Detroit. “I've lived here since the 50's. I've seen this city go up and down,” he said. “But now they're just gutting it! They're getting a fat paycheck from it too.”

He talked about the vast sections of the city abandoned to nature. “There are wild animals all over the city now. I saw a deer on the corner the other day,”

he said. "I even saw a pack of coyotes roaming down that road." He then addressed the indifference of city officials to the problem of blight. "All those houses could be fixed up," he said. "But they're sitting on their butts and getting rich."

Another worker came to the defense of NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, who currently faces charges of espionage and theft by the US government. "I think [Snowden] is an absolutely courageous man," he said. "He's what a lot of people aspire to be. I think a lot more people will come out and support him."

An 85-year-old auto worker spoke out against war. "I was in the Korean war and it was when I was over there that I learned that it's the rich sending us poor folk over to die for their meddling," he said. "No black folk and no poor white folks started it. It was the rich and their meddling."

SEP supporters also encountered a group of youth. The youth were against the wars abroad and would not support a new war. They rejected the idea of working class youth being sent to fight imperialist wars. SEP supporters explained that the Obama administration has continued the military occupation of Afghanistan, while waging a new war in Libya and now ratcheting up tensions with Syria and Iran. Although not yet of working age, they expressed serious concern over chronic unemployment. "Where are all the jobs?" one asked.

Barbara Herard, a Democratic Party candidate for Detroit City Council, interrupted discussion between SEP supporters and the youth. She cornered the youth, shouting, "Don't talk to them! They aren't supposed to be here!" Her aide admonished the youth, "You all are Democrats. You are Democrats. Don't listen to them." When one youth wanted to sign an SEP contact sheet, the aide tried to intimidate them. "Don't sign anything," he said. "Your mother taught you better than that." Her aide tried to take one supporter's flyers away.

Herard unsuccessfully attempted to eject the SEP supporters from the rally. "I'm gonna get the NAACP to get you all out of here. You better leave now because the police are coming for you!" One supporter noted that Herard's scare tactics were indistinguishable from that of the emergency manager Kevyn Orr. " *And what's so wrong with that?*" she shouted, "Kevyn Orr is here to help us!" She left with her aide in a huff.

A few minutes later, the youth approached the SEP

supporters. "I just wanted you to know that we all agree with you. I think everything you said is right," one said to one campaigner.



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