

Debbie Dingell: A candidate of wealth and privilege

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Socialist Equality Party candidate Niles Niemuth is challenging incumbent Democratic Representative Debbie Dingell, who has held the seat in the 12th Congressional District of Michigan for four years. Dingell succeeded her husband John Dingell Jr. when he retired after 59 years in office, following John Dingell Sr., who held the seat from 1933 to 1955.

All told, the Dingell dynasty has held a seat based in the Downriver Detroit area for 85 years, although it was reapportioned in 2001 to include the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area, making it one of the most heavily Democratic districts in the country. Debbie Dingell won reelection in 2016 by a margin of 35 percentage points, and she faces the same Republican opponent, Jeff Jones, whom she has outraised by nearly 30 to 1.

Dingell's status as the presumptive frontrunner is not due to any groundswell of popular support because of her political record. She inherited the seat in Congress, just as she inherited her multimillion personal fortune, the first from her retired husband, the second passing down from her maternal grandfather, one of the Fisher brothers who founded the Fisher Body company in 1908, making automobile bodies for the newly established auto assembly plants.

Once one of the largest auto manufacturing companies in the world, Fisher Body was purchased in 1926 by General Motors for \$208 million, the equivalent of more than \$3 billion in 2018, after which it continued as an internal division of the auto giant. Debbie Dingell began her career in her family business as a GM executive, serving as president of the General Motors Foundation and as the executive director for Global Community Relations and Government Relations. She later worked as a consultant for the American Automotive Policy Council, an industry trade and lobbying group.

According to her financial report filed with Congress, which lists only ranges of wealth and income, Dingell's personal net worth is at least \$4.4 million. Such is the nature of Congress as a "millionaires club," however, that this considerable fortune is hardly remarkable in Washington. According to the *Roll Call* website, Dingell does not even rank among the top 75 wealthiest members of Congress, across both houses. The average net worth of all 535 members of Congress approached \$4 million in 2014, and their combined net worth was at least

\$2.1 billion.

Like most Detroit industrialists and their families, Dingell was raised as a Republican, and only switched her party affiliation in 1981 when she married her husband John, then in his 26th year as a Democratic congressman, with close ties to the union bureaucracy. This switch was not simply the result of personal circumstances. It expresses the social essence of the Democrats as a party of, by and for the American corporate-financial aristocracy.

The marriage of an auto executive and lobbyist to "the Congressman from GM," as John Dingell was known for his ferocious defense of the interests of the Detroit auto companies, proved to be financially lucrative. "The couple accumulated millions in GM holdings in the early 2000s through Debbie Dingell's job, by far the largest portion of the family's personal wealth," the *Washington Post* noted in 2010. "At the same time, John Dingell was Detroit's staunchest ally, fighting against emissions and fuel-economy standards that could have hurt the short-term profitability of automakers."

John Dingell was a chief congressional advocate of Obama's bailout of the domestic auto industry in 2009, which restored the industry to profitability through savage attacks on the living standards of autoworkers, including the implementation of the two-tier wage system that slashed wages for new hires by half.

Both Debbie Dingell and her husband have enjoyed the closest relations with the United Auto Workers union (UAW), which received billions of dollars in GM stock as part of the 2009 restructuring. She appears frequently at union halls throughout southeast Michigan as an honored guest, and the UAW and other area unions are some of the largest contributors to her campaign.

There is deep historical logic in the political support for an heiress to the Fisher fortune by the UAW, which was established as a mass organization in the 1930s by means of the great sit-down strike at GM's Fisher Body plant in Flint. It provides further demonstration that the UAW, which is embroiled in a massive bribery scandal implicating top union leaders, has long since ceased to be a workers' organization, having been fully transformed into an instrument of management.

Since taking over from her husband, Debbie Dingell has

positioned herself as a figure within the Democratic Party's "left" flank, joining the Congressional Progressive Caucus, founded in 1991 by then-representative Bernie Sanders, along with five other Democratic members of the House. This was not because the auto heiress had suddenly been politically converted to "democratic socialism." It only demonstrates that the role of such "left" Democratic Party groups is to provide a fake populist cover for the pro-capitalist, anti-working class politics of the Democratic Party.

This includes the nominally independent pseudo-left satellites of the Democrats who promote such campaigns, such as the International Socialist Organization and Socialist Alternative, and those such as the Democratic Socialists of America that function openly as factions of the Democrats. Supporters of DSA members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib should consider the fact that these supposed "socialists" will join forces with a millionaire former auto lobbyist once they enter Congress.

Dingell's "progressive" posturing does not withstand serious scrutiny. For example, she has publicly denounced Trump's attack on immigrants, inviting a wife of an immigrant detained by ICE to this year's State of the Union address in January and appearing at a rally against Trump's policy of separating families in Ann Arbor in June. At the same time, she pleaded with Trump to reach a face-saving agreement that would leave the American deportation machine intact. "If you work with us and we can do something, I'll support the [border] wall so we can do something morally about these issues...we [the Democrats] have been ready to do this for months," Dingell said in an interview on MSNBC.

Dingell's real position on workers from Mexico is revealed in her enthusiastic endorsement of Trump's trade war measures, embracing Trump's toxic rhetoric of pitting American workers against their foreign counterparts.

"For too long, unfair trade practices have shuttered steel plants in Michigan and across the country and cost hardworking families the opportunity to earn a decent living," Dingell said earlier this year after Trump imposed \$34 billion in tariffs on Chinese imports. "While this is a first step to level the playing field, it cannot be the only. The President must keep his promises to address currency manipulation, the mother of all trade barriers, and renegotiate NAFTA in a way that puts working families first."

Dingell's support for trade war, which is also shared by the trade unions, has nothing to do with protecting "American jobs." Her professed "support" for the American worker, for example, did not prevent her from voting for the PROMESA act in 2016, which placed the American territory of Puerto Rico under financial oversight in order to divert billions in public spending into the coffers of the island's creditors, following the blueprint set by the bankruptcy of Detroit in 2013. The starving of funds for public infrastructure in order to pay off Puerto Rico's debt was a major factor behind the scale of the

devastation caused by Hurricane Maria, which killed at least 3,000 and left millions without power or water for months.

As it was in the 1930s, trade war is the means through which the American ruling class is seeking to resolve its own internal crisis at the expense of its rivals, including not only China but also the European Union. This basic strategic aim was summed up in the latest Pentagon strategy document, which declared that the "great power conflict," rather than the so-called War on Terror, was now the chief foreign policy concern of the United States.

As with Sanders and other "progressives," Dingell generally passes over the crimes of American imperialism with a complicit silence. Neither her campaign website nor her congressional website mention anything about foreign policy in their respective "issues" pages. Her real support for imperialist war, however, is indicated by the fact that she voted in July for the largest military spending bill in American history, along with a large majority of House and Senate Democrats.

Unsurprisingly, Dingell also supports the Democrats' bogus campaign over alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election, whose twin aims are to prepare the framework for censorship of political opposition and to force a direct confrontation with the world's second largest nuclear power.

The Socialist Equality Party is running Niles Niemuth against Dingell in the 12th district to build a socialist, anti-war and anti-capitalist movement among workers and young people. We reject the pseudo-left argument that the Democratic Party can be induced, either by mass pressure or by running candidates in Democratic primaries, to move to the left. The policies of the Democrats, as with Debbie Dingell herself, are determined by the class interests that they serve. Instead, our campaign is oriented toward mobilizing the independent political strength of the working class to put forth its own solution to the social crisis.

We encourage all those who are interested in this program to sign up, donate and volunteer at niles2018.com.



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