

Obama stumps for Democrats in Michigan: A legacy of social devastation

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Niles Niemuth is the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District. Visit Niles2018.com to donate and get involved in the campaign.

Former President Barack Obama is stumping at Cass Tech High School in downtown Detroit today for the Democratic slate of candidates running for state and federal office. Among those joining Obama on the platform are gubernatorial candidate Gretchen Whitmer, US Senator Debbie Stabenow and congressional candidates Elissa Slotkin and Haley Stevens.

The purpose of Obama's appearance is to try to convince workers and youth in one of the poorest large cities in America once again that the Democratic Party, a right-wing pro-capitalist and pro-war party, represents their interests.

Ten years ago, when Obama was first running for president, it was said that the election of an African American president would mark a fundamental progressive shift in American politics. However, Obama and the Democrats have left behind a legacy of social devastation for the working class in Detroit and across the country, paving the way for the election of the fascistic President Donald Trump.

Obama oversaw the forced bankruptcies of GM and Ford, resulting in the closure of factories across southeastern Michigan and the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs in the US. New hires in the auto industry had their wages cut in half. The United Auto Workers (UAW) union collaborated with the companies to eliminate the eight-hour day, implement a multiple-tier pay scale and create new low wage temporary part time (TPT) positions.

The horrific conditions that prevail in the factories as the result of the collaboration between the UAW, the

Obama administration and the auto companies have contributed to the deaths and injuries of countless workers. Jacoby Hennings, a 21-year-old TPT at Fiat-Chrysler and Ford, died at the Ford Woodhaven Stamping plant last year after an hour-long meeting with UAW officials over still undisclosed issues. Police say he committed suicide.

Obama last visited Detroit in 2016 to rub shoulders with union executives and auto bosses at the North American International Auto Show. His visit was meant to mark the "return" of Detroit after the restructuring of the auto industry and the city's 2013 bankruptcy, backed by Obama, which resulted in the looting of city workers' retirement pensions and a restructuring of the entire city in the interests of billionaires like Dan Gilbert.

As the president hailed Detroit's supposed renaissance, he was silent on sickouts being carried out by Detroit teachers to protest deplorable school conditions and to demand the return of wages and benefits given away by the Detroit Federation of Teachers.

Behind the scenes, Obama worked with his cronies in the unions, including AFT President Randi Weingarten, to smother the protests. Two years later, the same problems confront teachers and students, with all drinking fountains shut off at the beginning of the school year due to the discovery of high levels of lead and other contaminants in the water, including at Cass Tech.

That same year Obama travelled to Flint, Michigan where he told residents poisoned by the lead contamination of their drinking water that they should stop complaining and just drink the water. Obama facetiously dismissed the concerns of thousands of residents by taking a sip of Flint water.

Perhaps for this trip Obama will take a drink from a water fountain at Cass Tech and declare that everything is fine...

The legacy of the Obama administration in Detroit is one expression of the class policy that Obama and the Democrats oversaw for eight years. This included a massive bailout of the banks, an unprecedented transfer of wealth to the ruling elite, an attack on health care packaged as a "reform," and the expansion of war abroad. Former US Attorney General Eric Holder, who is joining Obama today, is most notorious for his argument that the president has the right to assassinate anyone, including US citizens, without due process.

Who are the candidates that Obama has come to Detroit to promote?

- Gubernatorial candidate Gretchen Whitmer is the former minority leader of the Michigan Senate and interim prosecutor for Ingham County. She comes from privilege as the daughter of Richard Whitmer, the former president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. With the backing of the health insurance industry, Whitmer has come out against universal health care.

- Senator Debbie Stabenow, a career politician, has represented Michigan in the Senate since 2001. While Stabenow voted against the launching of the war against Iraq in 2002 she routinely voted to fund the illegal military occupation. She voted in 2001 in favor of war against Afghanistan, a war which continues to this day.

- Elissa Slotkin, running to represent Michigan's 8th congressional district, is a former CIA agent who boasts of her work in the Bush and Obama administrations, which included three tours in Iraq and overseeing drone warfare, "homeland defense" and cyber warfare during a stint at the Pentagon. She has been endorsed by leading warmongers, such as John Negroponte and Stephen Hadley.

- Haley Stevens, running to represent Michigan's 11th congressional district, was chief of staff for the Obama auto industry task force which enforced major

concessions on auto workers as a condition of the bailouts of GM and Chrysler.

This line up exemplifies the Democratic Party as a party of wealth and war. Hailed by the rich executives and union bureaucrats in Detroit who have done very well since the bankruptcy, the Democrats offer nothing to the working class. They are no less a party of the ruling class than the Republicans.

As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for Michigan's 12th congressional district, I am fighting for a genuine socialist alternative for the working class to put an end to social inequality, poverty and war. I am fighting to build a mass movement to transform the banks and large corporations, such as the auto companies, into public utilities run democratically by the working class.

The problems that workers in southeastern Michigan and through the US and internationally confront can only be resolved through a break with the politics of the Democratic Party and the trade unions. Workers and young people need their own party, the Socialist Equality Party, to take political power into their own hand and reorganize the economy to meet human need not private profit.



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