

City Council of Harvey, Illinois refuses to address residents boarded up in homes

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On January 5, residents came home to find their apartments boarded up in buildings located at 14435-14437 South Halsted Street in the city of Harvey, Illinois, due south of Chicago. Many of the residents are low income and receive Section 8 program housing assistance. In addition, many senior citizens and disabled people reside in the building.

Several viral TikTok videos, viewed between hundreds of thousands and more than a million times, show crews boarding up apartments with residents allegedly still inside.

“There’s a 73-year-old man boarded up in this apartment, they broke the handle off the door,” says the voice-over in one live video. The resident in question, Rudolph Williams, a veteran, had to convince the crews to take down the planks they had nailed over his door.

Residents complained that the crews arrived in vehicles unmarked with any company name, and the crew members refused to identify the company or organization for which they were working.

The city of Harvey denies that it sent crews to board up a residential property in which tenants were still living, and claims the property managers sent the crews. The property management company issued a statement saying it coordinated the shutdown of the building with the city. It has taken care not to directly connect itself with the “onsite vendors.”

The property management company also claimed in a statement that it had been “negotiating with the city to prolong the evacuation time, swiftly notifying the residents through various channels, as well as offering concessions to try to aid in this challenging transition.”

The property managers also denied that any tenants had been trapped in their apartments as a result of the building being boarded up on short notice. City representatives have also denied these allegations, with

6th Ward Alderman Tyrone Rogers denying both the city’s involvement in boarding up the apartments and the claims that tenants were trapped inside.

Rogers said those claims were “a total exaggeration.” He added, “Nobody’s been boarded up inside any of the apartments. I know for a fact. I spoke with the police chief.”

The city of Harvey claims it had been communicating to the property managers since last year that the building was uninhabitable due to seriously dilapidated stair risers and balconies, and that a mandatory evacuation had been issued for October 28. The property management firm had failed to enforce that order, according to the city, and a further inspection determined that the structure was uninhabitable. On December 14, tenants received notices from the city that the property was being condemned and they had until December 29 to move.

Residents who received the letters got no support or resources from the city that was requiring them to move. Mary Brooks, a 66-year-old cancer patient, told WGN9 News Chicago that the letter she received from the city was riddled with typographical errors and that she was unsure of its seriousness.

Speaking for most of the building’s residents, Brooks told WGN9 that the notice given was completely inadequate. She said: “I have people that would probably help me, but where am I moving to? On Section 8, there is a 30-day minimum window, and the apartment you choose has to be inspected. I can’t just jump up and move.”

In response to growing outrage, the Harvey City Council held a meeting on January 8 that was attended by city residents. “There has got to be some kind of procedure put in place, especially when we are talking about seniors and people that are handicapped, when

you are getting ready to shut down a facility,” said Mauzkie Ervin, a former Harvey Public Library trustee. “There was no sign posted out there saying that this place is being condemned, that everybody was going to have to move.”

Aldermen intervened to cover up the responsibility of the city and the property managers to the working class tenants. The mayor attempted to deflect the concerns of city residents by saying Harvey was \$164 million in debt when he came into office, implying that there was no money to guarantee the basic right to housing for impoverished workers and their families.

Other City Council members did their part to cover up the city’s responsibility, with one suggesting that legal action could be taken against the management company, and another absolving the city of responsibility by saying it had failed to recoup money from businesses that owe it fees, fines and back taxes.

Clark tried to discredit 4th Ward Alderwoman Tracy Key and another City Council member, 2nd Ward Alderwoman Colby Chapman, saying they were the most frequent “no” voters on changes to city ordinances, though Clark did not specify if there was a specific ordinance violation committed in regard to residents being trapped in their apartments in a condemned building. Chapman and Key protested against being singled out by Clark, at which point members of the audience began to cheer in support. Clark then declared them out of order and had them escorted from the room by police.

This incident in a small city south of Chicago has resonated with millions because it speaks to the general experience of working people of being treated with arrogance and contempt by all levels of the government.

Corporate profits and the fortunes of financial speculators climb ever higher, but there is supposedly “no money” to meet the most basic social needs of workers—housing, health, nutrition.

The mayor’s response to opposition at the Harvey City Council meeting—police intervention—exemplifies the inability of capitalist politicians to offer any policies to address social needs and their fear of working class revolt.

Migrant workers are left to languish in nearby Chicago and deadly health threats such as COVID are ignored and concealed.

The Harvey outrage is moreover a further exposure of the reactionary and fraudulent character of racial and identity politics. The majority of the City Council members who oversee the relentless growth of social inequality are African-American, as are the majority of the tenants who were summarily ordered to vacate and then boarded up in their apartments. Of the city’s 20,324 residents, over 63 percent are African-Americans.

One year ago, a retired teacher was killed in a fire in a Chicago apartment building, ultimately the victim of the capitalist system and both of the parties of the ruling class that enforce its dictates.



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