

Deep-seated Economic Crisis, Declining Standard of Living in America, How to Defeat Trump's Austerity Measures

National Conference to Defeat Austerity in Detroit, Programmatic Approach to Economic Crisis, March 24

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Despite the claims of prosperity and full employment, millions are living in poverty and distress.

March 24 will be an important date for the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and more than 50 other organizations and individuals who have endorsed the National Conference to Defeat Austerity (NCDA) in Detroit. The gathering is being held at the Historic St. Matthews-St. Joseph's Church located on Woodward Avenue in the North End section of town.

This event is an outcome of several local developments in the city where hundreds of thousands of residents have seen their standards of living dropped precipitously amid massive layoffs in retail and service sectors along with the ongoing property tax foreclosure epidemic and the rising rents across broad sections of the municipality. A corporate media narrative which promotes the city as making significant progress after emerging from what was in actuality an illegal bankruptcy during 2013-14, often overlooks the plight of the majority African American working class population, many of whom are mired in poverty.

The NCDA concept arose after the Moratorium NOW! Coalition mobilized people surrounding the World Conference of Mayors held at the MGM Grand Casino Hotel from October 23-27 last year. This same propaganda fostered by the billionaire ruling class headed by Quicken Loans owner **Dan Gilbert** and the Illitch Companies, sought to utilize the World Conference of Mayors to spread blatant misrepresentation of the social and economic situation in Detroit.

A citywide Town Hall meeting entitled "Real Detroiters Speak Out!" was convened on October 27 after a week of activities including an organizing meeting, mass leafleting as well as an intervention at the World Conference of Mayors itself. Subsequent meetings in November and December made a decision to organize a broader event that would thoroughly analyze the present crisis to develop a programmatic thrust in light of several aspects of the domestic and foreign policies of United States **President Donald Trump**.

The recently enacted phase one of federal tax legislation will result in enormous cuts to social programs and environmental safeguards under the guise of providing incentives for corporations, workers and consumers. Nonetheless, the subsidization of financial institutions through a formal 14 percent corporate tax reduction means that the masses of working and

poor people will be denied much needed housing, healthcare and food assistance while the Pentagon budget continues to grow.

With specific reference to Detroit, Moratorium NOW! Coalition has stressed over the last three years that over \$700 million has been redirected from the Hardest Hit Fund supplied by the federal government, which was initially designed to assist homeowners negatively impacted by foreclosures and evictions, to questionable projects related to so-called “blight removal.” A significant portion of these funds have been turned over to the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA), described as a quasi-public entity, although it is run in the interests of the banks, corporations and real estate investors. The Land Bank has been under a federal investigation over allegations of bid-rigging and deliberate cost overruns.



Detroit Moratorium NOW! Coalition Real Detroiters Speak Out Town Hall, Oct. 27, 2017

Business-friendly **Mayor Mike Duggan** has opposed the utilization of federal funds earmarked for homeowners to be utilized to stabilize neighborhoods. Working on behalf of the billionaires based downtown, both Duggan and the compliant City Council has repeatedly voted in favor of the transferal of public assets such as taxes, land and infrastructure to the array of prestige projects which provide no tangible benefits to the majority of people.

Activists and trade unionists from Detroit to Puerto Rico Will Address NCDA

Highlighting the program of the gathering on March 24 will be honored guest from Puerto Rico **Ricardo Santos Ramos**, the former President of the Electrical Industry and Irrigation Workers Union (UTIER). Puerto Rico is described as a “commonwealth” of the U.S. despite the fact that it is a colonial outpost for U.S. imperialism.

Puerto Rico like Detroit was placed into an unprecedented bankruptcy claiming that the people owe \$72 billion to the banks. Compounding the financial war against the colony hurricanes Irma and Maria hit the area doing extensive physical damage destroying homes, electrical grids and production centers. However, the delay in reconnecting power and facilitating the restoration of a normal life for the people is clearly related to the dominance of the U.S. administration which has stifled the economic growth and development of Puerto Rico in order to further facilitate the exploitation of the people.

Another prominent speaker will be **Rev. Edward Pinkney** of Berrien County, Michigan. Pinkney is a former political prisoner who was targeted, framed, prosecuted and imprisoned on two occasions since 2006 for opposing the imposition of emergency management in

Benton Harbor.

Yvonne Jones, a co-founder of the Detroit Active and Retired Employees Association (DAREA), will address the conference in an opening panel on the character of austerity in the city. Tens of thousands of municipal retirees were subjected to cuts in their pensions and annuities during the bankruptcy in 2014. Guaranteed lifetime healthcare coverage was completely eliminated forcing families into the Affordable Care Act (ACA) for those not old enough to qualify for Medicare.

Other invited speakers include: **Dior Gabrielle**, organizer for the event; **Dante Strobino**, of the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union, UE Local 150; representatives of the Southern Workers Assembly; **Maurice B.P. Drew**, executive director of Refund America Project, ACRES; **Yexenia Vanegas**, Detroit organizer for the Poor People's Campaign; **Elena Herrada**, of the Detroit School Board in Exile; **Jonathan Roberts** of the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) of Michigan; **Julia Kassem**, of the U.S. Palestine Community Network in Detroit; **Jesus Rodriguez Epinosa**, former Counsel General in Chicago for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; **Jerry King**, a leading member of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute in Detroit; **Kristy O'Connor** of the Library Defense Network; **S. Baxter Jones**, a disabilities rights advocate and former member of the Homrich 9; **Rev. W.J. Rideout**, an organizer for the Fight for \$15 Campaign and Defenders for Truth and Justice; among others.

There will be workshops on housing, water shut-offs, the Poor People's Campaign, education and public transit. In addition a national town hall panel convenes to give voice to people across the country while another session on the international struggle against austerity illustrates the global aspects of the crisis.

The conference will close with a community meal and cultural program in the evening. Organizers will live stream portions of the proceedings to reach broader audiences.

Action Proposals Sought

This event will be educational with the intent to introduce several resolutions calling for actions around pressing issues in Detroit and nationwide. Over the next several months various struggles against poverty, racism, labor rights and environmental justice will intensify.

Conference organizers are seeking support for demonstrations to demand a moratorium on property tax foreclosures in Wayne County, some 36,000. On April 14-15, there will be antiwar demonstrations in several areas of the U.S. and the delegates will be asked to support these manifestations.



Detroit Moratorium NOW! Coalition graphic on housing crisis

The NCDCA is in solidarity with the Poor People's Campaign and wants the gathering on March 24 to serve as a partial springboard for broader participation in Michigan and around the country. Also May Day has been a focus of annual unified demonstrations in Detroit since 2014 when a coalition of over 40 organizations held daylong activities culminating in a march through downtown.

Additional resolutions and action proposals will be accepted. For those interested in attending or supporting this important conference contact the Moratorium NOW! Coalition at 5920 Second Avenue, Detroit, MI 48202.

A Facebook page with registration information and other resources can be reached [here](#). Although registration is free the conference will accept donations for printed materials and food.

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Abayomi Azikiwe is a frequent contributor to *Global Research*.

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