

Forced into Bankruptcy, the Privatization of Detroit and the Protest Movement against the Banks

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Detroit Gathering Internationalizes the Struggle Against the Banks and Austerity

People from around the United States and the world express solidarity

Grand Circus Park in downtown Detroit was the scene for the first International People's Assembly Against Banks and Against Austerity that placed the blame for the city's financial crisis squarely on the shoulders of the bankers and bosses. Detroit was illegally forced into bankruptcy court by a state-imposed emergency manager Kevyn Orr who is acting as an enforcer of the political will of the leading financial institutions seeking to exploit the majority African American municipality at an even higher level.

This event was organized by a cadre of activists from the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management, Fight Imperialism Stand Together (FIST), along with the endorsements and support of a host of groups and individuals including AFSCME Retiree Sub-Chapter 98, the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute, Stop the Theft of Our Pensions Committee (STOPC) Southeast Michigan Jobs With Justice, City Councilperson JoAnne Watson, Congressman John Conyers, Wayne County Commissioner Martha G. Scott, the United National Anti-War Coalition (UNAC), Central United Methodist Church in Detroit, Glen Ford, Executive Editor of Black Agenda Report (BAR), the MOVE organization based in Philadelphia, the International Action Center in New York, 1515 Broadway theater in downtown Detroit, the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, Detroit Eviction Defense, among others.

Over three hundred individuals and organizations endorsed the Assembly and many contributed by publicizing of the event that took on the banks and multi-national corporations for the crimes they have committed against the people of Detroit and the world. Many of the speakers who addressed the Assembly pointed out that if the ruling class can effectively carry out its full agenda in Detroit then other cities throughout the country would be victims of the same process of disempowerment and theft of public resources.

The two-day event was truly international in its scope and character. Endorsements and statements of solidarity poured in from various organizations and leading personalities throughout the U.S. and the world. Through videotape and the written word, statements were delivered from Prof. Jose Maria Sison, chairperson of the International League of Peoples Struggle (ILPS); Manik Mukherjee, General Secretary of the International Anti-Imperialist Coordinating Committee (India); Mohammed Kasin, Secretary General of the Lebanese Teachers Union; Eni Lestari, chairperson of the International Migrants Alliance; Marcia Campos, President of the Women's International Democratic Federation; the Peoples

Union Confederation—National Struggles Coordination of Brazil, French Bank Workers Union; Jorge Parra of the Association of Injured Workers and Ex-Workers of General Motors in Colombia; the Women’s Fightback Network, Marva Patterson of Carl Stokes Brigade of Cleveland and others.

National endorsers included the Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment, Occupy Oakland Foreclosure Defense Committee, Oregon Jericho Movement, Solidarity Against Austerity (Portland), Wisconsin Bailout the People Movement, the Women’s Health in Women’s Hands and Workers World Party. Delegations of people attended from Cleveland, Chicago, the Bay Area in California, West Virginia, Oberlin College in Ohio, Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore and Durham, North Carolina.

March on Emergency Manger’s Penthouse

One of the highlights of the first day of the Assembly was a march on the Book Cadillac Hotel where emergency manager Kevyn Orr has a penthouse costing \$4,200 per month paid for by the taxpayers of Detroit. Activists left Grand Circus Park and took the streets on Washington Blvd. where the hotel is located.

Orr, a bankruptcy attorney, who recently resigned from Jones Day law firm to take on the task of forcing the City of Detroit into deeper austerity and bankruptcy, is widely disliked among the masses. Just two days prior to the convening of the International Peoples Assembly, organizers from the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and other activists, demonstrated outside the Motor City Casino Hotel where Orr was delivering an address to the Detroit Economic Club.

The organization of the Assembly was genuinely a grassroots effort. Youth and workers who were a part of the Coalition for the International Peoples Assembly Against the Banks and Against Austerity, distributed over 15,000 leaflets throughout Detroit and its suburbs.

Teams of youth put up over a thousand posters in the Midtown, Downtown, East, West and Northwest areas of the city. The Michigan Citizen newspaper ran ads for the Assembly for two weeks in advance of the event.

People’s Cultural Program Held

The owners of 1515 Broadway theater donated the use of their facility for a cultural program on Saturday evening October 5. The event was coordinated by the Moratorium NOW! Coalition organizers Andrea Egypt and Writer L. Bush.

Cultural presentations were delivered by Insurgency, Jim Perkinson, Rise Up with Antonio Cosme, Aurora Harris, Walter Blaney, Wardell Montgomery and additional artists. Food for the Assembly participants was donated by local merchants committed to community development.

Workers Assembly Held on Day Two

The final sessions of the event featured a Workers Assembly where people were able to speak out about the impact of low-wage capitalist employment, two-tier automotive pay structures and the need to link community struggles with those involving people at the point of production and services. This session was chaired by long time UAW autoworker, labor

historian and Moratorium NOW! Coalition organizer Martha Grevatt.

Grevatt discussed the impact of the new work schedules on automotive employees where people have been forced to toil in ten hour shifts. Newer employees are making sometimes half of what veteran workers are earning in an attempt to maximize profits for the bosses and breakdown solidarity among the employees.

Concluding the Assembly was a workshop on action proposals that was chaired by Fred Vitale to continue the struggle against the banks and emergency management in Detroit and throughout the state of Michigan. October 23 has been designated as an international day of solidarity with the people of Detroit when hearings begin on the eligibility of the city for bankruptcy.

The action proposal workshop endorsed the call to surround the federal courthouse on October 23 demanding an end to the bank-imposed austerity and illegal bankruptcy proceedings. Efforts are underway to encourage people from all over the city and state of Michigan to participate in this mobilization and speak out at the federal courthouse on Lafayette Blvd.

A call has been issued for activists in other cities around the U.S. and internationally to hold demonstrations and actions in support of the working people of Detroit who are under siege by the banks and their agents in government. Larry Holmes of New York said that “Detroit is the Greece of North America” and should be viewed by the movement as such.

“What is happening in Detroit sets a dangerous precedent for the working class as a whole,” Holmes said.

In a leaflet circulated by the Moratorium NOW! Coalition during the final session of the Assembly it called for the people to “Come out and make your voice heard.” A series of demands for the October 23 includes the “cancellation of the debt payments to the banks which have destroyed our communities and to make the banks pay for the rebuilding of Detroit.”

Additional demands listed on the leaflet calls for the halting of attacks on city workers’ pensions, benefits and union contracts; the stopping of the privatization of city jobs, services and assets; the restoration of federal grants to serve Detroiters—under control of city workers and not private corporations; the immediate halt to the \$62 million looting of Detroit by Jones Day law firm and other Wall Street consultants and the end to the unconstitutional, anti-democratic, racist emergency management of this overwhelmingly African American city.

Abayomi Azikiwe Editor, *Pan-African News Wire*

Additional speakers addressing the Assembly at Grand Circus Park and 1515 Broadway included

foreclosure attorney Vanessa Fluker, City Councilperson JoAnne Watson, Wayne County Commissioner Martha G. Scott, Debbie Johnson, Sharon Feldman, Marianne McGuire, Andrea Egypt, Kris Hamel, Jerry Goldberg and Martha Grevatt of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, Lila Cabil and Fred Vitale of the Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management, William Williams, Vice President of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), Renee Manley of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Capital Stewardship Program, Jono Shaffer, Deputy Research Director for SEIU, John Riehl,

trustee of the Detroit General Retirement Program, Cecily McClellan, Vice President of the Detroit Association of Professional and Technical Employees (APTE), S. Baxter Jones, anti-foreclosure activist and former Detroit Public Schools teacher, Paul Felton, retired postal worker, poet and novelist, Dianne Bukowski, retired City of Detroit employee and editor of the Voice of Detroit, Sara Flounders, co-director of the International Action Center in New York, Tovy Fry, Oakland Occupy activist, Larry Holmes, First Secretary of Workers World Party in New York, Raquelle Saade, Puerto Rican human rights activist, Eva Panwanji and Tachae J. Davis of FIST, Johnnie Stevens of the Community Labor United for Postal Jobs and Services, Betsey Piette, anti-fracking activist from Pennsylvania, Sharon Black of the Peoples Power Assembly (PPA) in Baltimore, Nick Mirzoeff of the Militant Research Collective, New York, Lamont Lily, community organizer from Durham, as well as many others.

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