

“Housing, Water and Jobs Are Human Rights”: The Struggle against Repression, National Oppression and Economic Injustice

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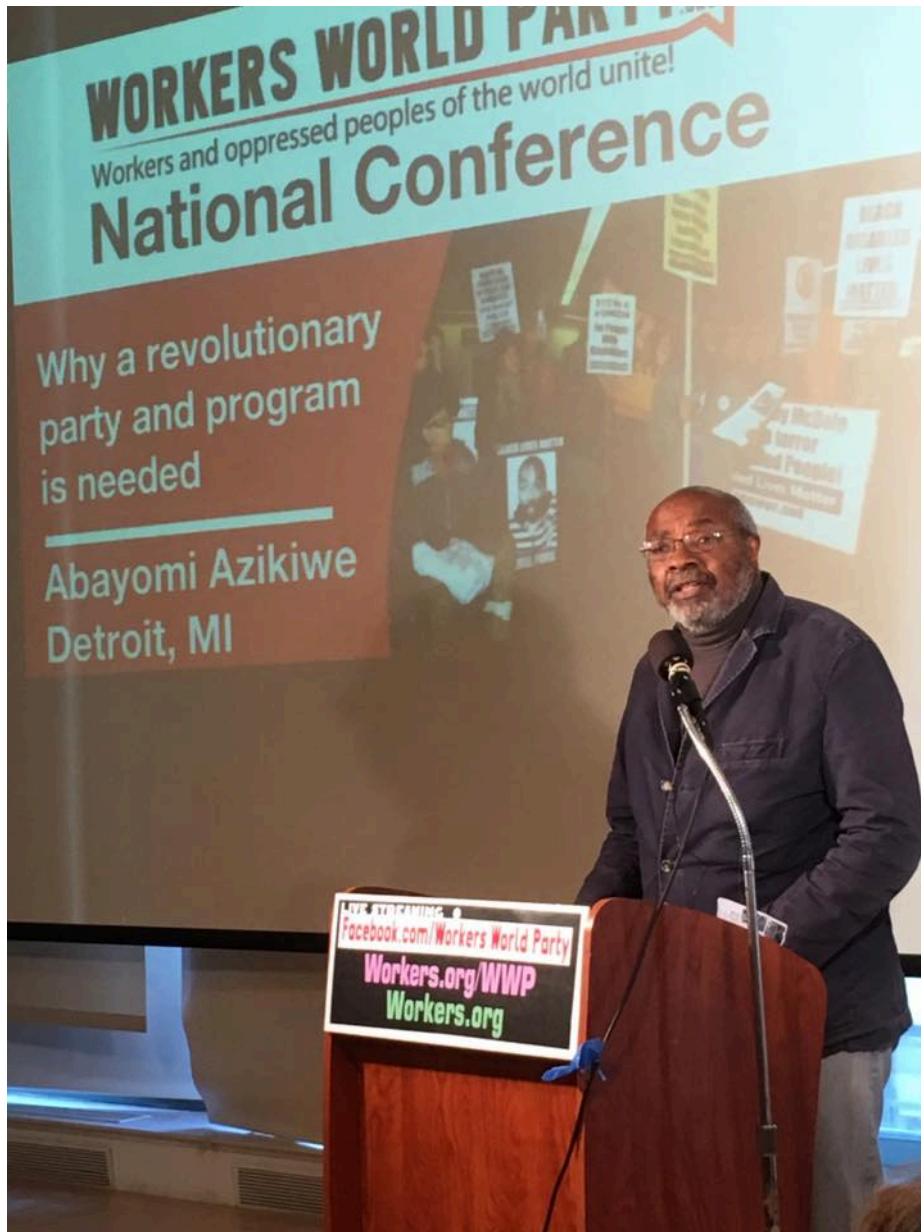
Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

This conference is being held at a critical juncture in the world movement against capitalism and imperialism. The only solution for the suffering and exploited masses of working and oppressed people is socialism. Our organizational and ideological efforts during this important period in history could determine the position we will occupy in the emerging phase of the class struggle domestically and internationally.

With the limited time that we have to discuss and analyze our work in the state of Michigan as well as around the country, it is essential that the case of political prisoner Rev. Edward Pinkney must be reviewed. Pinkney is a longtime fighter in the Southwest region of the Michigan where the restructuring of capitalist production has rendered cities such as Benton Harbor to extreme poverty and exploitation. Through the Black Autonomy Network Community Organization (BANCO), Pinkney and his followers have been waging a monumental campaign against the racist impunity of the Berrien County Courts, the previous imposition of emergency management along with the gentrification of public areas and communities in the interests of capital.

In December of 2015, we held a National Organizing Conference to Save Rev. Pinkney which was attended by people from several states. The gathering pledged to intensify our work to prevent what Pinkney himself, and others, felt were direct threats on his life. As a result of our work some of the elements within Marquette Branch Prison were pushed back and Pinkney has been transferred to Muskegon much closer to his family and supporters.



The plight of Pinkney is reflective of the racist nature of the justice system throughout the state of Michigan. Motions for bond pending the outcome of the appeals process, the appeal itself and other legal efforts were all denied by the courts. This illustrates clearly that legal methods, although utilized, cannot be relied upon for the freedom of our fighters or to win any semblance of justice for the working class and the nationally oppressed.

Nonetheless, there is resistance developing inside the prisons in Michigan and across the U.S. A national strike was held in September and the level of consciousness among the imprisoned nation, as Mumia Abu-Jamal refers to it, is reaching new heights. In many ways the situations inside the prisons represent increasing degree of repression meted out to the masses by the capitalist system which has exhausted any hope for a decent and productive life for growing numbers of people within in the U.S.

The Failure of Bourgeois Democratic Institutions

Two-and-a-half years ago through the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice (MECAWI) we issued an appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) at the height of the illegally imposed

emergency management and forced bankruptcy. We, along with other organizations across the U.S., as part of the U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN), addressed our appeal both directly to the UNHRC in Geneva as well as through the USHRN which annually participates in the UN Committee to Eliminate Racism and Discrimination (CERD) review process.

In a section of this appeal entitled “The Favoring of the Banks and Corporations During the Bankruptcy Process”, the document reads: “It is the contention of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and MECAWI, that the egregious policies of the banks and corporations are responsible for the underdevelopment and impoverishment in the City of Detroit. The targeting of Detroit and other majority African American municipalities in the U.S. by banks has been well-documented in numerous legal actions where financial institutions have agreed to pay billions of dollars in damages not necessarily to the victims of such actions but to the federal and state governments.”

This same report continues noting that: “Resources which should be utilized to keep people in their homes who have been subjected to predatory lending, as well as the payment of restitution and reparations to communities negatively and disproportionately affected by the actions of unscrupulous banks, has not taken place. In the State of Michigan over \$500 million allocated through the so-called “hardest hit” program to assist distressed homeowners have not been utilized to prevent mortgage or tax foreclosures. These same funds however now, are being utilized to identify homes to be torn down, many of these houses and small businesses were abandoned as a direct result of the predatory actions of the banks. A Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) has been established and is currently seizing thousands of homes and vacant lots without any consultations with residents of the affected neighborhoods in Detroit.”

Moreover, in disregard of the elementary civil rights ostensibly granted to African people in the aftermath of the Civil War, the document emphasizes: “The 15th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution passed by an act of Congress in 1870 was designed to grant the right to vote to the former enslaved Africans. Despite the nullification of the statewide vote in December 2012 against emergency management, the U.S. Justice Department and the White House are apparently collaborating with State of Michigan officials by fostering the blatant violation of the 15th Amendment along with the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.”

We also noted for the record submitted to the UNHRC stressing: “An appeal to the U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder in 2013 by several elected political officials requesting the intervention of the federal government in reviewing the denial of the right to vote and due process as protected under the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, and other acts of Congress including Civil Rights and Voting Rights laws, has gone unanswered. In addition to the legal brief submitted to the federal bankruptcy court by the Obama administration in support of the emergency management and forced bankruptcy of Detroit, the administration has endorsed the privatization of the administration of federal grants which had been previously handled by the City of Detroit departments and employees. The expropriation of these federal grants from the City of Detroit and turning them over to private foundations located outside the City has resulted in the termination of employees and departments that previously administered such grants where employees paid into the pension systems that are now under attack by the emergency manager.”

In light of these excesses carried out against the people of Detroit and the state of Michigan, the Democratic Party had the audacity to campaign among the masses requesting that they

go out and vote in large numbers for their candidates seeking election as president and vice-president in the recently-held national poll. Under such conditions the people know based upon their own experiences that there are no fundamental differences between the Democratic and Republic parties. We need a party of the working class and the oppressed that can speak in its own name and organize for the total overthrow of the racist capitalist and imperialist system, for the realization of national liberation and socialism.

The Struggle Continues: Housing, Water and Jobs Are Human Rights

Over the last two years we have been waging a monumental struggle against massive tax foreclosures and water shut-offs. Through our coalition efforts we have forced the Wayne County Treasurer to enact several moratoriums on property tax foreclosures which are a direct result of the predatory actions of the banks. Tens of thousands have been allowed to make payment arrangements on these usurious tax assessments which are in themselves illegal.

Based upon our efforts, the Michigan ACLU, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and other entities have filed a class-action lawsuit aimed at winning a moratorium through the courts on property tax foreclosures, noting that these state actions are a violation of the 1968 Fair Housing Act. We are demanding that the hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds be utilized for their intended purpose which is to keep people in their homes through the payment of delinquent property taxes and inflated water bills.

We have forced an upcoming meeting with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) demanding that they rewrite the regulations for allocating funds in Detroit and Wayne County for the aforementioned purposes. The corruption of the DLBA and the comprador Duggan city administration is an open book for all to see at this point.

We will continue our efforts aimed at building a revolutionary response to national oppression and rapacious capitalism at the upcoming March 25, 2017 party conference in Detroit. Next year represents the 50th anniversary of the heroic African American working class rebellion in Detroit. It is imperative that the actual history of these important struggles be told from the perspective the people.

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