

# May Day 2017 in Detroit Focuses on the Economic Crises and Racial Oppression

Rally and demonstration through downtown urges solidarity with all progressive struggles around the world

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*May Day is international worker's day and in the city of Detroit people from various organizations across the metropolitan area came together to express their discontent with the system of capitalism and imperialism.*

This was the fourth year that progressive forces have gathered in the downtown area to expose the false narrative of an economic revival in a major municipality which has the largest per capita African American population inside the United States.

The event was sponsored by the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice (MECAWI), the Michigan Peoples Defense Network (MPDN), Workers World Party and the Detroit Active and Retired Employees Association (DAREA). These organizations have been on the frontlines of the struggle to win adequate housing, water services, education, pensions, an end to state repression and the renewed Pentagon war drive throughout Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific.

Beginning at Grand Circus Park, a rally featured speakers from these groups along with others who called for a broad united front among workers and the nationally oppressed in the U.S. and around the world. May Day was the culmination of extensive outreach throughout Detroit and its environs involving the distribution of thousands of palm cards, planning meetings and social media postings. The local affiliate of ABC News, WXYZ, announced the rally and march over their television network the evening before.

**Joe Mshahwar**, a youth organizer for Workers World Party in Detroit, spoke on the role of Washington in fomenting and continuing the war in Syria. He denounced the arming of counter-revolutionary opposition groups which have attempted to overthrow the government of **President Bashar al-Assad** since 2011.

"Syria is the only progressive secular Arab state in existence now in the Middle East", Mshahwar noted. "The aim of the U.S. government is to topple the Syrian state and replace it with a regime in alliance with imperialism."

Later **Kris Hamel**, the Managing Editor of Workers World newspaper based in New York City, recounted the history of May Day emphasizing that it was initiated in the 1880s through the labor actions of largely European immigrant working class militants from the Socialist and Anarchist movements.

In 2006, Hamel stressed that,

“the holiday was revived by immigrant workers from Mexico and other Latin American countries. We are in full support of the immigrant rights movement. Workers have no borders.”



UAW 869 member **Martha Grevatt**, who is also a Contributing Editor to Workers World, read a statement from the Party’s Labor fraction expressing unconditional support to the immigrant community. Grevatt has worked in the auto industry for nearly three decades and has traveled in several Latin American countries including Cuba and Honduras. Just last year, she was a delegate from the U.S. at the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) Congress in Durban, South Africa.

Participants pledged solidarity with the Indigenous people of Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Two organizers at May Day had spent considerable time at Standing Rock assisting the Native people in the efforts to halt DAPL which threatens the land and water supply of the people living in the area.

### **Detroit Still Faces Economic Crisis**

DAREA co-founder and retired municipal employee **Cecily McClellan** spoke about the illegal emergency management and bankruptcy imposed on Detroit during 2013-14. The dictatorial measures resulted in the privatization of public assets including the theft of the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), the Detroit Public Works (DPW), the regionalization of the water system under a Great Lakes Authority, along with the slashing of pensions and healthcare benefits for existing employees and retirees.



This retiree organization was born out of the

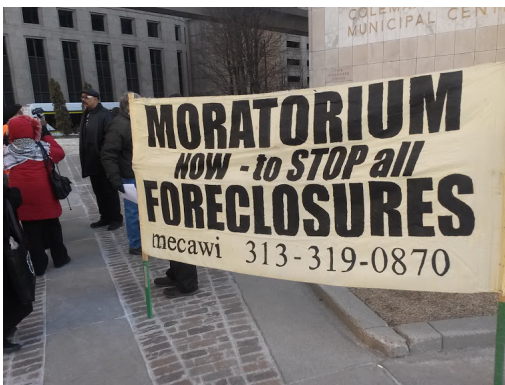
campaign to halt these monumental cuts handed down on behalf of the financial institutions and multi-national corporations who are responsible for the impoverishment of Detroit. DAREA has appealed the rulings by former **Federal Judge Steven Rhodes** who presided over the bankruptcy proceedings in 2013-4 through the Sixth Circuit and it is now before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Other speakers noted that public taxpayer funds slated for distribution to the school system, libraries and for municipal services are being captured by corporate-oriented entities such as the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) which funnels this money to private interests who are unaccountable to the people who live in the city. Prestige projects such as the new Red Wings and Pistons arena in downtown relies heavily on public funding despite the for profit nature of these initiatives.

The city was disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis beginning in 2007. Detroit was targeted by predatory lending institutions which stole tens of thousands of homes and small businesses from residents.

Today there is an epidemic of property tax foreclosures in Wayne County that stems directly from the bank-induced crisis of the previous decade. The Moratorium NOW! Coalition has called for an immediate halt to these home seizures as well as the termination of water services, an ongoing problem potentially damaging over 18,000 households in the coming weeks and months.

**Prof. Bernadette Atuahene**, who is in Detroit to study the social character of the housing crisis, addressed the May Day rally at Grand Circus Park. As an objective observer she mentioned her qualitative research in the Republic of South Africa for ten years through the Land Claims Courts established by the African National Congress (ANC) government in the aftermath of the overthrow of the racist apartheid system.



“The situation in Detroit is one of the worst I have seen in comparison to South Africa and the plight of Afro-Colombians in South America.”

Her research report will be published later this year in a leading academic journal.

### **March on the Federal Government and the Banks**

After the conclusion of the rally there was a march from Grand Circus Park down Woodward Avenue to Michigan. Demonstrators took the streets leading to the Federal building where another rally was held. Activists sang Civil Rights Movement songs and called upon the administration of **President Donald Trump** to halt the attacks on African Americans, women, immigrants from the Middle East, Latin America and Asia.

**Arthur Bowman** of the Black Youth Project 100 Detroit chapter addressed the crowd sporting a Marxism-Leninism-Maoism shirt. This organization has grown across the U.S. in response to the escalation of racist police violence against African Americans. Bowman called for an end to home foreclosures and water shut-offs.

The demonstration then proceeded south on Cass Avenue to West Lafayette passing the Federal Court building where the bankruptcy case was held three years ago. Marchers continued through Campus Martius walking pass the headquarters of Quicken Loans, headed by **Dan Gilbert**. Gilbert is projected by the corporate media as the “white savior of Detroit.”

Nonetheless, Gilbert’s business practices are under scrutiny through a Department of Justice civil case accusing Quicken Loans of fraudulent practices utilizing Federal Housing Administration (FHA) funds. Gilbert has been a beneficiary of the “restructuring” of Detroit having dozens of foreclosed commercial building turned over to his firms while being given massive tax breaks to further drive African American and working people out of the downtown area.

The coalition of organizations which sponsored May Day pledged to continue their work in reversing the current economic situation. Despite the propaganda by the ruling class that Detroit is on the rebound, the people remain the poorest of any large municipality in the U.S.

Various activities are already being planned including a Town Hall meeting on the property tax foreclosure issues in support of the existing class action lawsuit demanding a moratorium on these home seizures by the Wayne County. Additional demands include the payment of reparations for the damage done through the assessment of taxes far in excess of the actual values of most homes in the city.

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