

# State Repression and the US Economic Crisis: Claims of “Recovery” and “Prosperity” Ring Hollow

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By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

Global Research, October 12, 2015

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

**Note:** *This address was given at the Detroit Workers World public meeting held on Saturday October 10, 2015.*

This is yet another important public meeting on the fight for justice against the banks and corporations along with their surrogates in the state apparatus. In the areas of the auto industry, housing, education, environmental justice and the prison-industrial-complex related to the growth of militarization of the police, the crises in the current system is laid bare for all conscious people to witness.

United States capitalism and imperialism is the primary source of the wars of regime-change which are designed to perpetuate the dominate role of Washington and Wall Street globally. In order to maintain this position of hegemony internationally it is also necessary for the ruling class to wage a war against the working class, nationally oppressed and the poor on the domestic front as well.

However, before I discuss various aspects of the current crisis in Detroit and its broader significance and implications, I want to pay tribute to a leading fighter in the struggle for African Liberation and Socialism and that is Jorge Risquet of the Communist Party of Cuba who passed away just last week on September 28.

Risquet joined the revolutionary movement in Cuba in the early 1950s and traveled to Guatemala during the period of the siege engineered by the Eisenhower administration in 1954. He would serve in the youth wing of the nationalist and anti-imperialist movement aimed at overthrowing the neo-colonial regime of Batista who served as an agent of Washington.

The Communist Party of Cuba was formed through the merger of revolutionary nationalist and socialist forces in 1965. Risquet held leading positions in the Party where he participated as a volunteer in the Congo campaign of 1965 that was headed by Che Guevara. Although the Congo effort was not successful, a decade later Cuba's role in Angola, beginning four decades ago, was critical in the total liberation of that oil-rich former Portuguese colony as well as the independence of the entire Southern Africa region.

Cuba sent over 300,000 of its own citizens to fight in Angola alongside the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and its military FAPLA in addition to the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and its military arm of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). Risquet served in Angola and would lead the negotiating team in

coalition with the MPLA Government against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa which was supported by U.S. imperialism under the Reagan and Bush administrations.

These negotiations backed up by the armed and organized masses of Southern Africa won the right of national independence in Namibia and the release of political prisoners in both Namibia and South Africa. Namibia received its independence on March 21, 1990 just over a month after Nelson Mandela was released from prison in South Africa.

The African National Congress (ANC) embarked upon negotiations with the apartheid regime, a process that lasted for over three years. In 1994, the ANC took power in South Africa after winning a solid majority in the first non-racial elections in April of that year. Nelson Mandela, who served over 27 years in the dungeon of the racist regime in South Africa, became president of South Africa. All of these monumental developments occurred with the interventions of peoples throughout the world in conjunction with the role of revolutionary Cuba.

### **U.S. Continues to Be on the Wrong Side of History**

U.S. imperialism was on the wrong side of the Angolan and Southern African liberation movements and the African Revolution overall. As it was true then, it is so as well today.

The situation in Syria is a stark illustration of imperialism's role in the contemporary period. Russian air and cruise missile strikes can only be viewed as defensive deployments aimed at strengthening the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus. The U.S. and its allies in NATO have been doing everything in their power to bring down the Assad administration.

This was the same policy as what transpired in the North African state of Libya where in 2015, after four years of neo-colonial war and destabilization, the once proud nation bears very little resemblance to its former self. Libya has gone from the most prosperous state in Africa to the one that is in complete chaos and a source of instability throughout the region.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants are being trafficked through Libya across the Mediterranean into Southern and Eastern Europe in a manner which some European Union leaders have described as being analogous to the Atlantic Slave Trade. Under the unchecked militarized foreign policy of Washington, this is the fate that awaits much of Africa, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific. Syria has four million displaced persons and refugees scattered from inside the embattled country into Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and other states.

In Yemen, the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is engineering another war that is almost completely hidden from the American people. Thousands of Yemenis have been killed and tens of thousands are wounded and injured. Millions more are without adequate supplies of food, water, medical care and social services while Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) coalition continues to bomb and conduct ground operations daily.

We must also mention recent developments in the West African state of Burkina Faso where a coup by military elites was defeated through the mass mobilization of the workers and youth along with pressure from the regional and international communities. Burkina Faso under Capt. Thomas Sankara, underwent a brief revolution during 1983-1987. Sankara was

assassinated by Blaise Compaore with the assistance of other military figures that were leading figures in the presidential security regiment (RSP) that staged the recent coup.

The people of Burkina Faso are committed to holding their national elections and to disbanding the dreaded RSP.

Finally on the international scene, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in South Africa went out on strike in the coal industry two weeks ago. A national strike in solidarity with NUM involved hundreds of thousands of workers from broader sectors of the working class.

Consequently, the class struggle continues in Africa and the Middle East and other parts of the world. These movements have a direct impact on the situation in Detroit and throughout the U.S.

### **Detroit: The Political Economy of Post-Bankruptcy**

In Detroit we have been shining the light on the massive tax foreclosures, auctions and eminent evictions facing tens of thousands more residents who will be forced out of the city. The magnitude of the crisis is unprecedented in the history of Wayne County and the banks are at the source of the problem.

Our campaign earlier this year was successful in not only placing the housing crisis within a political context but also winning an extension of over two-and-a-half months allowing thousands to make arrangements to pay their property taxes. Nonetheless, this is a crisis that is totally unnecessary since the federal government had sent \$500 million to Michigan as part of a purported "bailout program" in the aftermath of the worse financial downturn since the Great Depression.

These funds have been grossly misallocated and underspent. There is still another \$200 million sitting in Lansing that could wipe out the entire delinquent tax bills in the city of Detroit. Yet the capitalist politicians will not raise the issue because their banker bosses would not appreciate them making such a suggestion.

These funds are being used to tear down homes rather than rehabilitate structures keeping neighborhoods intact and rebuilding them. A rare corporate media report this week pointed out that there is blatant corruption taking place in the demolition process where the costs are constantly rising through a rigged bidding process while the Duggan administration, working on behalf of Dan Gilbert, who chairs the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force, serves as front men for the so-called "developers and investors."

This set of circumstances is proving deadly for the people of Detroit and Wayne County. The County is facing emergency management and possible bankruptcy like Detroit. Consequently, there is no reason for anyone to be thrown out of their houses particularly with federal funds at the disposal of the Snyder administration.

Obviously there is an agenda of forced removals for Detroit and other majority African American cities. This program is decades-old and is implemented through job losses, predatory lending, utility and water shut-offs, the closing of schools and community centers, the escalation of police terrorism, the denial of quality healthcare, adequate public transportation, social and public services.

The city cannot be rebuilt without its people. The capitalist system remains fragile some

eight years after the collapse of 2007-2008. Major corporations are still announcing massive lay-offs and scandals within the auto industry have shaken the confidence in the capacity of the manufacturing sector to provide the quality and safety that they spend billions to advertise on a daily basis.

Although the federal government has found various banks engaging in deliberate misrepresentation and fraud, very few of the bankers have gone to prison. Moreover, these entities are still given a license to do business and to set the terms for the availability of capital in the U.S. and globally.

Every year the banks are handed over hundreds of billions of dollars by the Federal Reserve Bank, which is our money. The bailout of the banks continue through the appropriation of public tax dollars and public assets as is being done in Detroit and other cities for “prestige projects” such as sports arenas, housing gentrification projects, where the raising of rents is championed by the corporate media and the forced removal of African Americans and the poor is characterized as “progress.”

The police and the courts serve the interests of the banks and corporations. A recent spike in police killings of residents is reflective of the escalating levels of state repression. Every week there are reports on television, radio and the print media which hails the arrests of “gang members” for drug trafficking and other activities. Nevertheless, the real criminals in the ruling class who systematically deny the people the fruits of their labor are not arrested and shut down by law-enforcement and the courts.

Such a scenario is not unique to Detroit. It is endemic within the U.S. capitalist system itself. However, Detroit and the state of Michigan is bearing the brunt of the economic crisis and re-structuring due to the legacy of labor and national struggles over the last century-and-a-half.

Detroit was a major base for the Underground Railroad during the period of slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Great Migration brought hundreds of thousands of African Americans into the city and state during the early to middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The recognition of the UAW and other trade unions between the 1930s and the 1960s forced concessions from the bosses to the workers. All of these gains are being taken away in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through attacks on the right to vote, the eight-hour day, equal pay for equal work, local control of government and housing rights.

I do not believe that we can vote our way out of this crisis. We defend the right of working people to exercise their democratic prerogatives. Nonetheless, history will show that labor recognition, African American and women’ rights, to the extent that they still exist, were not won at the ballot box but within the arena of mass and working class struggle in the streets, workplaces, schools and the communities where people live.

This is why we place great emphasis on the indispensable role of the workers and the oppressed organized and mobilized independently of the capitalist two-party system. This is what the ruling class fears and seeks to prevent.

*This address was given at the Detroit Workers World public meeting held on Saturday October 10, 2015.*

*Other speakers at the event included Martha Grevatt, a UAW auto employee who analyzed the current situation involving the no vote on a contract proposal for Fiat Chrysler workers; David Sole of Moratorium NOW! Coalition gave an update on the transfer of Michigan political prisoner Rev. Edward Pinkney who is at present residing at the facility in Marquette; and Jeremy Royer, an indigenous activist reported on recent events in Michigan and nationally where Native American land rights are still being violated. The event was chaired by Debbie Johnson of the Detroit Branch of Workers World Party.*

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Azikiwe](#)

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