

The Struggle to Defeat Austerity in Detroit and the World

Origins of the global economic crises are to be found within the capitalist and imperialist system

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Featured image: Abayomi Azikiwe addresses the National Conference to Defeat Austerity, March 24, 2018

Note: This is the text of an address delivered during the opening plenary of the National Conference to Defeat Austerity held on Sat. March 24, 2018 at the Historic St. Matthews-St. Joseph Episcopal Church located in the North End section of Detroit on Woodward Ave.

The conference was attended by several hundred delegates from various regions of the United States

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On behalf of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition we wish to again welcome all of you to the National Conference to Defeat Austerity (NCDA). This event is a direct outgrowth of the movement that has evolved in Detroit over the last decade or more.

In 2006-2007, the world economic downturn was sharply felt right here in this municipality and throughout the state of Michigan. For years prior to this time period, we witnessed the precipitous decline in real wages, capital flight, joblessness and home foreclosures which climbed to record levels.

Many of us who were co-founders and organizers for the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice (MECAWI) advanced the slogan: "Money for Our Cities, Not for War." There were indeed imperialist wars raging in Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Colombia, Palestine, the Western Sahara, etc. However, at the same time, there is a domestic war being waged continuously against the working people and nationally oppressed right here in the United States.

One aspect of the austerity which is being imposed on people in 2018 is in part a direct result of the runaway Pentagon and national security budget. If we consider the spending of the Department of Defense and the intelligence agencies, these combined costs us at least \$1 trillion annually.

Nonetheless, can we safely say that we are safe and secure? Obviously not. The so-called "war on terrorism" has not brought peace to the U.S. let alone other targeted geo-political regions of the world.



The students who are marching in Washington, D.C. and throughout the country, including in downtown Detroit, say they are imperiled on a daily basis just for attending schools. If one cannot find safety and security in schools, then the society has a serious problem that should be addressed immediately.

When there is a social system which cannot guarantee everyone housing, food, water, environmental safety, quality education, healthcare and freedom from national oppression and economic exploitation, then change is needed. Although the U.S. ruling class promotes itself as the most prosperous and democratic country on earth, there are more people falling below the poverty line every year while the gap between rich and poor is ever widening.

A purported “full-employment economy” cannot be worthwhile when people are working every day, perhaps one, two, three or more jobs, yet they cannot provide the necessities for themselves and their families. When uncertainty is the norm for the majority of people within U.S. society, then the notion of “safety and security” is a misnomer.

The stability and growth that we require must be based on the needs and interests of the majority within U.S. society and the world. Our principal enemies are those who are depriving us of our inherent right to a decent life. These are the forces of oppression and exploitation that must be decisively defeated.

State Repression and the Economic Crises

If the propaganda of the corporate-controlled and government media is not enough to lull us into complacency and acquiescence, the state apparatus is all too willing to confine millions into economic marginalization through underemployment, wage theft and super-exploitation. Here in Detroit we are told regularly that the displacement of African Americans and working people in general is good for the city. That the billionaire ruling class must be given “incentives” to invest in Detroit so some of these resources will in essence “trickle down” to the masses.

It becomes even worse when we realize that the “prestige projects” which are promoted as “development” are largely financed through the tax revenue of the majority African American residents by capturing public assets so desperately needed for job creation, municipal services, housing, education, public transit, ecological safeguarding and infrastructural repair. Politicians who are said to be downtown to service the people instead are pawns of the corporate interests which take our money for their own coffers. There is no real debate over the imposition of these white elephants passed off as “milestones for progress.” What happened to referendums on trillion-dollar structures which rely on tax

funding absent of any public consent? We are fed up with others telling us what is good for us. Our objective is total freedom from oppression, exploitation and degradation.

Beyond the undemocratic economic plans forced upon the masses, the prison-industrial-complex must be viewed as another means aimed at our oppression and exploitation. Slavery is still in existence within the criminal justice system. Not only are the rulers incarcerating millions across the country both documented and undocumented, with many others under judicial and law-enforcement supervision, their armed agents are also gunning us down in the streets of Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, New York City, Newark, Los Angeles, etc. and most recently in Sacramento, California, where young Stephon Clark was brutally killed by cops in his grandmother's backyard.

What Are Our Tasks Today?

We are here today for three fundamental reasons. It is necessary for this gathering to clearly define the character of the multiple crises we face as oppressed, impoverished and working people. Our problem is economic at its base nonetheless the solutions are political and social. The first step in any struggle is to know who your enemies are. Our oppression and exploitation are rooted in a system of injustice. In order for us to achieve liberation we must challenge and overcome the structural barriers to our genuine progress.

Moreover, we have come together to network among ourselves. To discuss both our strengths and weaknesses within the context of building a sustainable movement aimed at taking on the forces which are exercising hegemony over our very lives. At present no one organization has the capacity to advance the struggle without the cooperation of others. So therefore, we are here to find avenues of unity and coalition building towards our much-coveted objectives of creating a society devoid of the evils **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** cited more than fifty years ago: racism, poverty and militarism.

Finally, we look forward to the outcome of our deliberations today. The workshops should be encouraged to hammer out action items which are both specific as well as broad enough in scope so that they can be adopted by the entire conference.

Special thanks to our guests from around the state, country and indeed internationally. The same interests which are oppressing us on the east coast, the west coast, the South, in Puerto Rico, are here in Detroit. All around the world people are rising up against racism, national oppression, state repression and transnational corporations and banks.

These same financial institutions which stole our homes and wrecked our neighborhoods in Detroit are also the enemies of the people in the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, the Asia-Pacific and Europe as well. We are compelled to expand our focus to understand that we have natural allies among the peoples of the globe.

Let us take up this calling and utilize our time together today to advance our movement. We are no longer just victims. We are the architects of a future where the interests of the people take precedence over those who would perpetuate our exploitation and oppression. The wealth of the planet belongs to us. Let us reclaim it in the interests of us all.

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Joseph Episcopal Church located in the North End section of Detroit on Woodward Ave.

The conference was attended by several hundred delegates from various regions of the United States including various cities throughout Michigan along with Chicago and Rockford, Illinois, Indianapolis, Durham, Boston, Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia, Salt Lake City, etc. Special guest Ricardo Santos Ramos, the former President of the Electrical Industry and Irrigation Workers Union of Puerto Rico, gave a major address in the afternoon plenary focusing on international affairs.

The opening plenary where this talk was given also featured presentations by Yvonne Jones, City of Detroit retiree and founding member of the Detroit Active and Retired Employees Association (DAREA), Erica Anna, Xicana organizer from Chicago, Dante Strobino, organizer with Southern Workers Assembly of Durham, and another special guest Rev. Edward Pinkney, former political prisoner in Michigan and longtime activist from Berrien County. The day-long conference was endorsed by over 45 different organizations and individuals from throughout the U.S. and internationally.

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