

Socialist Equality Party continues campaign against Detroit evictions

By Tom Hall
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With the appointment of emergency manager Kevyn Orr, the assault on living standards in the city of Detroit has reached a new stage. In order to continue paying the city's wealthy bondholders, entire sections of city services are to be privatized or sold off.

Wealthy Detroit landowners are salivating over the prospect of the gentrification of entire neighborhoods in the city. One such neighborhood, Cass Corridor near downtown, contains the Henry Street apartments where over 250 residents, many elderly or disabled, face eviction at the end of June.

The Henry Street apartment complex has been bought out by a wealthy real estate developer whose identity has been kept secret but who, residents speculate, is associated with Little Caesar's Pizza owner Mike Ilitch. Ilitch, who also owns the Detroit Red Wings hockey team and the Detroit Tigers baseball team, has plans to build a new hockey arena and shopping center in the area.

Henry Street Apartments residents and supporters in the area are determined to fight for their neighborhood (See "SEP campaigners oppose Detroit home evictions"). A reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to residents at the Henry Street apartments and students at the nearby Cass Tech High School. They discussed the fight to mobilize the working class against the emergency manager's plans to sell off the city's public assets, including the masterpieces at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) and encouraged them to attend the Socialist Equality Party meeting in defense of the DIA on June 13.

In a discussion about the city's claim that there "is no money," for education, culture or other essential services, Labrenda Brown, a Cass Tech student, said, "Our school didn't have enough books because they said there wasn't enough money." Her friend Sabrina

Baldwin added, "I haven't had a science book all year."

Aysha, another student at the high school, had a wide-ranging conversation with WSWs reporters. "There are certain things like art that they shouldn't touch. For poor families in particular, it's hard to have art but we have the DIA."

"Art is necessary. I couldn't live without art and music. Art is not just a creation, it's a mindset. For me it's also an escape. There are just some things you can't take from people. We have to fight this now, otherwise just imagine what they're going to do next year or the year after that."

Turning her attention to the situation facing tenants at the Henry Street apartments, she expressed outrage, saying, "Right across the street they're trying to evict the seniors for some sports team. They're kicking out people who have lived there for decades to have another shopping center next to a school.

"That hockey team's so rich they could buy the whole school and five more like it. Instead, they're getting a new stadium and we don't have enough books. And this is one of the better schools."

Aysha expressed her determination to fight. "I just want to paint a mural, hold some strikes, get people involved. Detroit's going downhill. I'm only 16 but everything's changed so much since 1996. We have to educate people about what's going on."

Santos, like most of the Henry Street residents interviewed by the WSWs, expressed his anger at the plan to gentrify his neighborhood. He believes that if Ilitch buys up the neighborhood, he will connect the area with nearby Motor City casino, owned by Ilitch's wife, Marian. "They need to keep their casinos all connected," Santos said.

The reporting team also talked to two elderly

residents of the apartments, Nick and Horace. Nick, who explained that he has lived in the neighborhood since 1979, explained that the building was dilapidated and in disrepair. “This place is full of bed bugs and roaches. Just the other day I saw one crawling on the porch. There’s only one working streetlight on this whole block.”

Nevertheless, he said, he refused to move out of his home. “They gave us an eviction notice but they didn’t have the right. We’re not moving out until the court says. We’re like a family here.”

Nick placed the issues facing himself and his neighbors in a historical context. “Oil barons back in the day just took what they want—it’s like that here.”

He added, “I tell all the kids out there to get their schooling, otherwise there’s no jobs. But now there’s the student loans they have to pay back and it’s hard.”

Horace was concerned about the prospect of moving away from his neighbors. “There’s so many people I know here but if I move I don’t know anybody. I’ve been here since ‘94 and never been late on rent. Now they’re turning me out.”

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