

# U.S. Social Forum in Detroit

Thursday 24 June 2010, by [FEELEY Dianne](#) (Date first published: 15 May 2010).

2010 IS A year of one, two, many Social Forums around the world, including the second U.S. Social Forum. The first USSF, attended by more than 12,000, was held three years ago in Atlanta. It featured an opening march that wove through the city streets, stopping for rallies at important sites of social struggle, including Grady Hospital, where activists from AFSCME Local 1644, explained their opposition to the privatization of the city's largest public hospital. The Forum, the result of two years of planning by a National Planning Committee, included plenaries each evening and 800 workshops.

The World Social Forum begun a decade ago in opposition to the World Economic Forum, which is held annually in Davos, Switzerland, attended by governmental officials and the business class. First organized in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the World Social Forum was conceived as an event delegitimizing neoliberalism, positing another model for humanity and strengthening international networks of social activists. After several successful World Social Forums in Brazil and India, the International Council decided there was the capacity to build regional Forums.

Grassroots Global Justice, an alliance of people of color-led U.S. grassroots organizations, initiated a process of preparing the ground for U.S. social forums by building a National Planning Committee. Today the NPC encompasses non-profits, left think tanks and social movement organizations. Following the successful Atlanta USSF, the NPC discussed sites for a second forum.

## Why Detroit?

Detroit seemed like a logical site: a city with militant working-class and Black power traditions but where capitalism has devastated its manufacturing base. Once a city of 2.2 million, Detroit now has a population of less than a million; official unemployment stands at 28.8% but it seems closer to 50%. The school system is being destroyed through charterization. Detroit is ground zero of a decaying system.

Yet the city's resources are still found in its people, their music and art, their community gardens, and the idea that the closed plants should be reconverted to 21<sup>st</sup> century manufacturing needs. Planning for the USSF in Detroit has been anchored by Centro Obrero, East Michigan Environmental Action Council, Michigan Welfare Rights Organization and Southeast Michigan Jobs with Justice.

On June 22 the USSF2010 will open with a march, led by the indigenous community, and highlighting ongoing struggles in Detroit. These include shutting down the city's incinerator (unlike many urban areas, most Detroit neighborhoods do not have curbside recycling); opposing police brutality and forcing DTE, the utility that provides the region with gas and electricity, to end the shutoffs that result every winter in deaths. This year marked 14 more deaths: Vaughn, Markesha, Demonte and DeMarco Reed, Trovion, Fantasia and Selena Young, Booker T. James Sr., Jeffrey B. Garrett, Lynn Greer, Tyrone Allen, Marvin Allen Sr., Welton Crawford and Davion Grant.

The first day of the USSF will focus on Detroit and the Region, the following day on International issues and the final full day on Alternative Visions. Saturday will conclude with the People's Movement Assembly. Since the Forum itself is a coming together of the social movements rather than a decision-making space, the PMA provides participants with an opportunity to develop future

plans. For further information, and conference registration, go to <http://ussf2010.org/>. Several organizations plan to have their meetings in Detroit, before or after the USSF2010 — including Allied Media Conference, Hip Hop Congress, Green Party and Labor Heritage Foundation.

Another World Is Possible  
Another U.S. Is Necessary,  
Another Detroit Is Happening.

**Dianne Feeley**

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