

USA. Detroit's Crisis — Coming to You?

Sunday 29 January 2012, by [FINKEL David](#) (Date first published: 1 January 2012).

THERE ARE TWO realities to grasp about the current plight of Detroit.

Reality one: Detroit is caught in a set of interlocking crises, from the level of the world economy and national political gridlock down to the viciously reactionary Michigan state government and the yawning divide between the city and suburban Detroit, that would severely challenge the most competent, the most visionary, the most energetic and most progressive city leadership.

Reality two: That's not the leadership we've got.

In the 2009 city election, the area's economic elites heavily backed a new political leadership team headed by former Pistons great and NBA Hall of Famer Dave Bing for mayor, and a prominent TV news anchor Charles Pugh as president of the city council. Curiously enough, Bing is one of two ex-basketball stars currently serving as mayors of seriously challenged U.S. cities (for political/sports trivia buffs, Sacramento mayor Kevin Johnson is the other).

Not only are both Bing and Pugh not-ready-for-prime-time political rookies, they are unable to work together. In a reversal of the usual pattern of legislative-versus-executive budget battles, the city council has pressed for more massive budget cuts than the mayor. In any case, the council has voted against cutting its own administrative budget or its city-issued high-end Crown Victoria cars.

The mayor and council did get together for a bizarrely staged joint press conference to oppose the looming threat of a state-appointed Emergency Manager, but the spectacle did more to amuse than inspire Detroiters who often face two-hour waits for buses if they come at all, and four-hour delays in police response to genuine emergencies. (The suburban bus system, by the way, has just cut 15% of its service as well.)

Keep in mind also that there are dozens of U.S. municipalities that are about two steps behind Detroit's slide toward bankruptcy or insolvency. That's reality three: Detroit's crisis may be coming to you.

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P.S.

* From Against the Current (ATC) N°156, January/February 2012. <http://www.solidarity-us.org/>