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***Behind the hype and headlines
in the investigation of Detroit
Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick***

A special investigative report by the *Michigan Socialist*

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THE SOCIALIST PARTY strives to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control: where working people own and control the means of production and distribution, through democratically-controlled committees and assemblies; where full employment is realized for everyone who wants to work; where workers have the right to form unions freely, and to strike and engage in other forms of job actions; and where the production of society is used for the benefit of all humanity, not for the private profit of a few. We believe socialism and democracy are one and indivisible.

The Socialist Party fights for progressive changes compatible with a socialist future. We support union and electoral actions — independent of the capitalist-controlled two-party system — to present socialist alternatives. We strive for democratic revolutions — radical and fundamental changes in the structure and nature of economic, political and social relations — to abolish the power now exercised by the few who control the economy and the government.

The Socialist Party is a democratic, multi-tendency organization, with structure and practices visible and accessible to all members.

special report

Coming to a head

Behind the hype, headlines in the investigation of Kwame Kilpatrick

The last two months have not been easy for Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. The self-proclaimed "hip-hop mayor" has come under fire twice for his handling (or mishandling) of the city's problems. And now, the state and federal governments are stepping in.

By MARTIN SCHREADER

Editor, the *Michigan Socialist*

The City has been in trouble since the end of the administration of former mayor Dennis Archer, who bankrupted the treasury by channeling all revenue into "sweet deals" and tax breaks for large corporations and turning the streets of Detroit into an armed camp, with police crawling around every corner.

When Mayor Kilpatrick took over at the beginning of 2002, he was immediately confronted with a billion-dollar debt load. This left the former Michigan state representative with a choice about how to make up the shortfall: rescind the "sweet deals" and tax breaks, or demand blood from the city's workforce. True to form for him and his political colleagues, he decided to attack the city workers.

However, in spite of his "hands on" approach in this attack (and his alliance with certain sections of the local media), his efforts have not been carried out according to the strict plan laid out by the capitalist interests that really run this city.

Much of this began to come to light on May 12, when Kilpatrick and Detroit Police Chief Jerry Oliver fired deputy chief

Gary Brown. Brown, who headed the department's "Professional Accountability Bureau" (formerly the Internal Affairs division), had been investigating how the department handles internal investigations and discipline.

He was also the liaison in dealings between the police department and the U.S. Department of Justice related to the latter's civil rights investigation into police brutality and violence.

It has become clear now that Brown's dismissal was not due to any inadequacy in his work, but rather that he was perhaps a little *too good* at it. That is, apparently, Brown's investigation into problems at the Detroit Police began leading him to the mayor's office.

According to Brown, the reason he was so unceremoniously dismissed from his position was because he uncovered incidents among the mayor's security force, which is drawn from the Detroit police, of falsified overtime records, drunk driving stops and even an accident involving a city-owned vehicle.

The mayor, so far, has denied any of this happened, and said his dismissal of Brown was due to a "violation of trust" and a failure to maintain confidentiality.



Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick (left) continues to be on the defensive over an alleged party at Manoogian Mansion (right), the mayor's residence. It is fairly obvious that all the stories about a stripper, a fistfight and alleged rowdiness at a party thrown by the self-proclaimed "hip-hop

mayor" is meant as a sideshow and diversion to keep the media (and the public) occupied while the Republicans attempt to smash the Wayne County Democratic Party machine and institute a one-party regime in Lansing, just as they are attempting to do in Washington.

Meanwhile, much of the truth of the situation has been buried, with the help of the capitalist media, under a "theater of the absurd," centering on an alleged party at the mayor's residence, Manoogian Mansion, a stripper and a fistfight involving the mayor's wife.

While such a story makes for good television ratings, it is a sideshow and should be treated as such. The real issue here involves something much deeper.

A CAREFUL REVIEW by the *Michigan Socialist* of the information that has surfaced in the last two months can only lead to the conclusion that, to one degree or another, both sides are *correct* in their accusation and *flatly lying* in their denials.

To put it another way: it is clear that Brown's accusations of problems with the mayor's security detail are true, but so are Kilpatrick's accusations that Brown violated the mayor's "trust" by breaking confidentiality.

To make accusations of corruption, falsified records and cover-ups against any component of the municipal government in The City is like accusing a state prison of housing a murderer or a rapist. However, the mayor's administration has made a special name for itself in this regard.

There is rampant nepotism and cronyism (12 of the top spots in the administration are held by his close friends or family) in the city government. His "security detail"

is the largest of any Detroit mayor since the unit was formed, and is composed mainly of old friends from school who are now cops.

And, the mayor's taste for the good life (Sport Utility Vehicles and motorcycles, club hopping, parties, etc.) is more or less paid for by tax dollars — either through Kilpatrick's salary or his expense account, his pension from the state legislature, or his family's money (which also comes from taxpayers, since his mother, Carolyn Cheeks-Kilpatrick, is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives).

All of this should certainly be of concern to working people in The City. And, in that sense, we can understand why some Detroit residents would sympathize with the accusations of Brown and the building campaign against the mayor. However, there is something more sinister to these accusa-

tions, and to a certain degree Kilpatrick touched on it lightly in his statements on Brown's dismissal.

When the mayor insisted that his decision to dismiss Brown was based on a breach of confidentiality, he was saying more than he let on.

Judging by the events of the last months, it is apparent that someone within the Detroit Police Department was leaking information to the Justice Department in the period prior to the federal government stepping in and appointing an independent monitor.

The most logical person to be that "leak" would have been Brown, whose role as liaison between the city and the federal government made him privy to what both departments were doing, and was able to coordinate the gathering of information based

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on that privilege.

But, to what end? The answer to that question requires us to step outside of the immediate, media-stoked issues, and concentrate on the politics of the state of Michigan.

LAST NOVEMBER, Michigan residents returned a Democrat to the governor's office for the first time in 12 years.

The election of Jennifer Granholm stunned the Michigan Republicans, and the GOP nationally, since the previous governor, John Engler, had been able to not only unseat an incumbent Democrat, but also handily defeated their candidates in two subsequent elections. As far as the Republicans were concerned, the Democratic opposition in Michigan was not an issue.

But they obviously underestimated the strength and resilience of the Michigan Democrats, especially their powerful party machine in Wayne County.

Even with the weaknesses in the machine following the departure of longtime party "boss," County Commissioner Ed McNamara, it was apparently strong enough to rally the rest of the party in the state to put Granholm, who came out of Wayne County, in the governor's mansion in Lansing.

No doubt this, combined with the election of Kilpatrick (another creature of the Democratic machine in Wayne County) as mayor of Detroit, angered the Republicans to no end.

They finally realized that the base the Democrats have built in Wayne County serves as the party's anchor in Michigan, and as long as it is relatively intact the Democrats remain a challenge to one-party control of the state government.

From the perspective of the Michigan Republicans, the road to supremacy over all



Ex-Deputy Chief Gary Brown and his lawyer (and long-time friend), Michael Stefani. Why is Stefani, a tax and real estate attorney, representing Brown? Could it be because of his loyalty and close ties to the Michigan Republican Party?

levels of the state government lies through the destruction of the Democratic Party machine in Wayne County. In this campaign, they have already been partially successful:

- The investigation of financial irregularities in the budget for the new Detroit Metro Airport resulted in McNamara's departure from political life, and a shift in power within the machine itself — from the old Democratic officials to the DNC-approved "New Democrats," in the person of Robert Ficano;
- The state Attorney General, Mike Cox, has successfully killed the efforts of Wayne County to opt into lawsuits against tobacco companies and gun makers to recoup the costs of medical cover-

age, thus putting the county, and Detroit in particular, further into debt;

- The moves by the state legislature to take The City's water department and bus system out of their hands and impose regional (read: suburban-controlled) administration has further crippled the principle of "home rule" in Detroit and Wayne County.

In this context, we can better understand the motivation the Republican Party would have to go after the mayor and the city government. And, certainly, the excesses of the Kilpatrick administration have given them ample opportunity.

But *motive* and *opportunity* are only two of three things needed to establish the commission of a crime. The *means* of carrying this out are important as well.

THIS IS WHERE Michael Stefani comes in. Stefani is Brown's attorney and a former colleague of the ex-deputy chief. He has already filed a \$14 million lawsuit against the mayor, his top aides and the city of Detroit on behalf of Brown and a former member of the mayor's security detail.

The lawsuit, in and of itself, is not surprising, since suing someone has become as much an American pastime as baseball. However, there are two things that stick out.

First, the amount sought, \$14 million, could be enough (in combination with the

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The question seems to answer itself.

recent bailout of the Detroit Medical Center) to push The City's deficit over \$100 million, which could trigger a slide into bankruptcy and takeover.

Second, Stefani himself is a licensed real estate and tax lawyer, not someone who takes on wrongful discharge or "whistleblower" cases. Thus, to see Stefani acting as lead counsel for his "old friend," Gary Brown, seems strange. Would not an experienced lawyer, like Stefani, want to find the best attorney in the appropriate field for his friend?

It begs the question: *Why Stefani?* Again, to answer that question requires looking at the politics.

According to documentation acquired by the *Michigan Socialist*, Stefani is a longtime contributor to and member of the Michigan Republican Party — specifically, the Oakland County Republican Party, which is the state party's base and "anchor."

His Troy-based law firm often represents businesses with long and storied ties to the Republican Party in estate and tax cases, as well as in National Labor Relations Board appeals and lawsuits against cities and states.

He and his partners in the law firm (Frank, Stefani, Haron & Weiner) have donated thousands of dollars to Republican candidates both in and outside of Michigan, including former Rep. Ronna Romney, Rep. Frank Grasslee, Rep. Joe Knollenberg and George W. Bush. Not one of these do-

nations was under \$500; most were \$1,000.

So, why would a real estate and tax-centered law firm with strong ties to a political party seeking total control over the state government seek to represent a former cop fired by a mayor from the chief party of opposition for breaching confidentiality? The question seems to answer itself.

(One would certainly think that the Oakland County Republicans have a great number of lawyers that specialize in wrongful discharge and "whistleblower" cases. Why were none of these people tapped by Stefani or his firm to represent Brown [or, at the very least, to be the lead counsel]? Apparently, there is more to this relationship between Brown and Stefani, to say nothing of the relationship between Stefani and the OCRP, than meets the eye.)

While there is yet no known "smoking gun" in this incident, there is enough evidence on hand to formulate a hypothesis: The Michigan Republicans are seeking to use the problems in the Detroit city administration to break the back of the Democrats, and render the latter a permanent "opposition" in successive Republican state governments.

This would explain why Stefani, a trusted financial backer and member of the Republican Party, would step out of his usual legal role as a real estate and tax attorney, and take on Brown's case.

This would further explain why the Re-



Gary Brown, former Detroit Police Deputy Chief, was fired by Kilpatrick for "breach of confidentiality." So, what was it, Mr. Brown? What did you tell that you should not have? More importantly, who did you tell?

publicans objected to the Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans, who is perceived as a part of the Democratic Party machine, leading the initial investigation into the events surrounding Brown's dismissal.

Initially, this would have also explained why Attorney General Cox launched a separate, criminal investigation into the allegations raised by Brown, over and against the objections expressed by Gov. Granholm.

He had made clear that his intention was to use the power of the courts, including subpoena and possibly even grand-jury power, to back up his effort.

However, the fact that so much of the cover story has been exposed as rumor and innuendo resulted in Cox abandoning the investigation within days of starting.

Tersely referring to the alleged party at Manoogian Mansion as "urban legend," Cox effectively threw the ball to whomever would prefer to use it (e.g., other Michigan Republicans or the Bush regime), and swore off responsibility for it.

THIS BRINGS US to the final question: Where, if anywhere, does this end? What is the goal now for the Republicans and those seeking to institute one-party rule in Michigan?

Without the "smoking gun," we cannot say for certain. However, the current dynamics of the situation allow for the formulating of hypotheses and possible scenarios for the next period.

As it stands, with Cox bowing out the



Mayor Kilpatrick and Detroit Police Chief Jerry Oliver (right) publicly address charges leveled by former Deputy Chief Gary Brown at a recent press conference. Accusing the Detroit city government and its agencies of corruption and nepotism is like accusing a state prison of housing murderers and rapists. Attempting to deny that such things are taking place can only be attributed to delusion or bold-faced lying.



campaign to oust Kilpatrick, and thus taking the power of the state's law-enforcement arm with him, it is up to either the state courts (via Stefani), the state legislature (currently controlled by the Republicans) or the federal government to intervene and make an issue out of the charges.

A successful lawsuit by Stefani and Brown, combined with the ongoing intervention into the Detroit police by the U.S. Department of Justice, could set up the conditions for the removal of Kilpatrick by recall, by state intervention or even federal consent decree.

Given the current tensions and publicly aired antagonisms between the mayor and the police force, it is clear that Kilpatrick cannot rely on them for support. This is especially true now, with the new federal intervention and oversight by John Ashcroft's Justice Department.

As well, the City Council is hopelessly divided between the mayor's supporters and his opponents, and they are incapable of providing any kind of solutions to the prob-

lem.

Because of the weakened and fractured character of the Detroit executive and legislative power, which has only intensified over the recent period as a result of the federal intervention and the current allegations, it is possible that the only solution acceptable to the capitalist class, and its agents in the state and federal governments, is direct intervention into the city government.

That is, the likely scenario following any indictments against Kilpatrick and his administration would be a state or federal takeover and the appointment of an unelected "administrator" and "advisory board" in place of the elected mayor and City Council.

There is, of course, precedent for this, in the form of the "reform" School Board, imposed by then-Governor John Engler, and accepted by Granholm (then state Attorney General), Archer and Kilpatrick (then state House Democratic leader). That precedent can be extended relatively easily to

the city government.

The federal government would not necessarily accept new elections as a substitute. The recent Detroit City Council election has seemingly confirmed what had been thought for a while: Detroit residents do not generally want candidates that are seen as agents of or controlled by the capitalist class.

Thus, the only way that Washington or Lansing could get a compliant city government is through either massive bribery or through an undemocratic municipal dictatorship — with terms dictated by the major capitalist interests in the region (the automakers and suppliers, major banks, technology firms, etc.).

The election of Kilpatrick was originally regarded as an extension of the "de-Colemanization" campaign that started under former mayor Dennis Archer.

However, the opposite has turned out to be the case. Now, given the current economic and political situation in the U.S., such "eccentricities" can apparently no longer be afforded. ★

An afterword by the editor of the Michigan Socialist

AS SOCIALISTS, we are not really concerned about the health and welfare of the Democratic Party or its leadership.

For us, the Democrats represent one wing of the capitalist class in the political structure, and thus we are opposed to its policies, its candidates and its methods of governing.

At the same time, because we are Socialists, it is our obligation to defend a (formally) democratically elected government against attempts to depose it in favor of an unelected regime.

Just as we opposed the Supreme Court's installation of George W. Bush's regime in Washington, so we would oppose the imposition of an unelected "administrator" by government decree.

If this is somehow perceived as "saving" the Democratic Party, so be it. However, if history is any guide, it is likely that the Democratic leadership, starting with Gov. Granholm, would sooner "take the bullet" for their Republican colleagues rather than see them receive the treatment they deserve.

Our intervention into this battle between dif-

ferent sections of the ruling class has only one goal: the defense of the (albeit limited) democratic norms that exist in The City, against a possible unconstitutional and undemocratic takeover by the state or federal governments.

A rollback of democratic norms in the city government, like we saw with the takeover of the Detroit Public Schools, would set back the movement for democracy and the rights of working people for years to come.

It would render the 1 million citizens of Detroit almost completely disenfranchised and without a political voice.

This is our immediate central concern: the democratic rights of the people — primarily the working people — of Detroit.

However, we defend democracy on our own terms, with our own methods. Our defense of the (formally) democratic norms in Detroit are not to be confused with defense of Kilpatrick or any of the nine members of the City Council, except in the sense that they were elected and have the right to serve.

That said, we harbor no sympathy for Kilpatrick or his administration. We do not forget

that his first acts as mayor were to attack unionized city workers, with the aid of local media (e.g., Fox News), and to attempt to intimidate them into submission.

As far as the specific charges go, Socialists can certainly support the formation of an independent, community-based commission of inquiry into the allegations.

Let the people of this city decide whether Kilpatrick's excesses and methods of administration are an issue of concern.

With the above in mind, we call for the convocation of an independent commission of inquiry.

The commission, were it to be established, should have the power to investigate all aspects of the city administration, to depose witnesses and parties involved, and to call for new, democratic elections if it is found that the allegations against Kilpatrick warrant it.

Even though this cannot solve the ongoing campaign of disenfranchisement taking place in Detroit, it would be a step in the right direction. ★

Martin Schreder