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MLK Day 2019: New Yorkers march against 'megatowers' gentrification

written by Greg Butterfield
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New York — Despite frigid weather, hundreds joined the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day March to Reclaim the City on Jan. 21. Neighborhood residents and allies marched from Manhattan’s Lower East Side through Chinatown to City Hall to protest Mayor Bill de Blasio and real estate developers’ racist gentrification and displacement of low-income communities.

Calling for “No Towers, No Compromise,” the march began at the 80-story Extell luxury tower, which has a “poor door” to separate low-income and middle-income families from the rich. De Blasio has agreed to the construction of three more of these towers, which will loom over the Rutgers public housing projects and block residents’ view of the nearby East River — and the sun.

“De Blasio says he’s opposed to Trump’s wall at the border,” said one speaker, “but he is building a wall right here.” Signs declared the Democratic mayor and Republican president “two sides of the same coin.”

Neighborhood groups are bringing a lawsuit in an attempt to halt further construction of the luxury towners. Marchers called for the mayor to drop his “housing plan” that rewards Wall Street and big developers, and adopt the [Chinatown Working Group rezoning plan](#), drawn up by local tenants’ groups and people-based organizations to protect communities and provide housing for poor and working people.

The New York Police Department was grotesquely aggressive toward this march that honored Dr. King. Although organizers said the city agreed to grant a parade permit, police forcibly pushed protesters onto the sidewalks with their vehicles when they tried to march in the street, endangering people.

As the march approached City Hall, police targeted an organizer in the crowd and tried to seize her. Marchers surrounded the cop, shouting loudly for the woman's release. The cop was forced to back down.

The [Coalition to Protect Chinatown and the Lower East Side](#) was a convener of the march. Their statement said: "We know that our fight against these proposed illegal megatowers is no different than the multiple fights being waged across New York City as Mayor de Blasio's administration continues to act against working people in approving citywide rezonings that enrich real estate developers over communities, selling and privatizing New York City Housing Authority and other public resources and giving tax subsidies to billionaire companies like Amazon rather than the people he swore to serve.

"We need to join forces and stand in solidarity against the gentrifier-in-chief mayor and let him know: We will not be moved! The lawsuit against the towers will only be successful if the community stands strong and united so that the powers that be have to back off."

SLL photos: Greg Butterfield

