

Detroit residents speak on economic crisis and US elections

A WSWWS reporting team
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Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party supporters spent Saturday morning at Eastern Market in Detroit speaking to residents about the economic crisis and the US presidential election, now just over two weeks away.

What was almost universal among those who spoke to the WSWWS was deep concern about the economic situation and opposition to the measures taken by the government in response to the financial crisis, including the \$700 billion bailout of Wall Street. These sentiments largely transcended political affiliation.

Detroit has been devastated by decades of economic stagnation and job destruction. Once a booming center of auto manufacturing, the Big Three have systematically eliminated hundreds of thousands of jobs in the area. The state of Michigan has lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs in the past eight years alone. Its official unemployment rate stands at 8.9 percent, a figure that will certainly soar over the coming months.

Detroit has the highest rate of home foreclosures in the country, with nearly 5 percent of homes in the metropolitan area in some state of foreclosure in 2007.

The looming economic crisis, which threatens to send the country into deep recession or depression, will have incalculable consequences. There is some talk that General Motors might buy up Chrysler, raid its cash fund, and eliminate almost all of its production facilities. GM announced last week that it would lay off 1,600 more workers, including 1,200 in metro Detroit--500 of these in Hamtramck, two days before Christmas.

Those interviewed expressed a broad range of political opinion. Many are planning on voting for Barack Obama, and the Detroit metropolitan area will go overwhelmingly to the Democratic Party candidate. Our reporting team distributed recent articles from the WSWWS, including statements by SEP candidates advocating a break with the Republicans and the Democrats.



Peggy

Peggy, a social worker at a nearby hospital, said she had "mixed emotions" about the bailout. "To me the question is, 'Who do you bail out?' I think it should be the people. The corporations really should know better."

Peggy went on to say, "They are not helping us out. People are losing houses left and right. Eight houses are in foreclosure on the street next to mine. It's awful. There are three people in foreclosure where I work."

On the elections, Peggy said she was "undecided." "I generally vote

Democratic but I always look at the individual, and I think that McCain has some strong policies. I don't like his running mate, however. I am not sure that it would be very good if something were to happen to him."

Because Peggy works in the health care field she sees on a daily basis the problems residents of the city face. "Concerning health care, I think we need to fix the problem. I don't think that it should be modeled after Canada, since I see people come to the US from Canada for care, but it is obvious that a lot of people need care. The *Wall Street Journal* published an article on my hospital that said we turn people away. And that is just not true. We don't turn anyone away. Actually, this is one of our problems, because so many people in the Detroit area are without health care and we have to absorb the costs."

Sue and Bryan had just arrived at Eastern Market to shop and stopped to talk to the WSWWS. Sue is a middle school teacher in a local school district. Bryan is a language pathologist in a separate school district. Both of them spoke of the conditions in the schools.

Bryan said he was glad to still have a job given the general state of the economy. Sue said she had been following the bailout proposals and was opposed to the measure passed by Congress. "Who is going to pay for this decision?" she asked. "It is going to be your kids."

Sue said Detroit public school teachers have not received a pay raise in 16 years after taking into account inflation. "The Detroit teachers got a pay raise of 3 percent, but it is over three years. Inflation is at 2-3 percent and there is no cost-of-living adjustment, so in effect it is a pay cut."

Bryan said his caseload has risen substantially over the past years because of cutbacks. "Before, I had a caseload of 60 kids. Now it is 75. It really should be 30, to give each student adequate attention."

Sue said she does not believe the government is seriously interested in providing working class children a decent education. "The No Child Left Behind Act is a disaster because it is not adequately funded. And frankly, we are only teaching the kids to pass the test."

She said there had been a tutoring program sponsored by corporations like Chrysler and General Motors. Now, she said, the companies are hurting financially and have cut back on the programs.

"There is no tutoring for the kids and they are falling further and further behind," Sue said. "I see it year after year. Kids in the 7th grade and can't read. I see it all of the time. And it is not the kids' fault. Frankly, I think it is by design. It is to keep the kids dumb. You know the British did it to the Irish. They prevented them from going to school. It is not slavery, but it is similar.

"If they put billions of dollars into education they would get definite results. But they will not do it."

Concerning the elections, Sue felt Barack Obama would be the best

choice. "We finally have a candidate from another race. That would not have been possible 10 years ago," she said. "I think he really cares about the middle class. The only thing is any president will have his hands tied in terms of what he can do. I am hoping though that with a Democratic Congress maybe something will be done."



Amy

Bryan also said it looks like Obama will win the election. "I hope he is not a disappointment. Everything in the past eight years has been a disaster. I don't think it will be that way with Obama, but you don't know for sure."

Amy was shopping with two other friends. She said she was also against the bailout and felt they needed to spend it on education and Social Security. "People need jobs and a living wage. No one can live on \$7 an hour."



Andrea

Her friend Andrea said, "They should be doing more to help the people with their loans." Especially since Bush was for the bailout, Amy said she was against it. "It was a way of providing money for the rich," continued Amy. "It is nothing but welfare for the rich."

When a WSWS reporter pointed out that Obama also supported the bailout, Andrea said she thought he was forced to do so.

David, a poet living in Detroit, was also opposed to the bailout. He compared the bailout to a maneuver by big business and the Bush administration. "Basically, what it is all about is corporate greed."



David

When it was explained that Obama also supported the bailout, he defended Obama. "Maybe he supported it, but still he is the lesser of two evils. Look at what has happened in the last two elections. Bush stole the one in 2000, and things have really become bad since 2004. There's got to be a change. We can't continue with more of this."

Sandy, a finance manager for an electronics company, identified herself as a Republican. She told the WSWS, "The presidential candidates are all figureheads. If they get into office, they will still have to get the Senate and the House behind them. There is no division between the two in what they say. They repeat whatever is in the media at the time. Look at the last debate. They were asked questions that were all rehearsed and rehashed."

She commented on the slump in the auto industry and the merger talks between GM and Chrysler. "My husband works at General Motors, in research and development. This time it is going to hit him. His retirement took a hit of \$75,000 in the past quarter. We are not even 50 yet; we have a long way to go to retirement."

On the recent bailout of Wall Street she remarked, "You are seeing it hit the middle class and the working class. There has got to be more than a solution for the upper class. I want to see where this money is going."

George, an electrical engineer, said, "I think the banks ripped off everybody. It's a big money grab. A lot of people had their hands in the cookie jar."

Asked how the economic situation was affecting people on his job, he said, "People are getting delinquent on their bills. They're not hiring people and people are losing their jobs through attrition. Future employees will probably come in at a lower rate."

"People's 401(k)s are getting hit. They're giving the banks billions of dollars but there's no money for social programs. In the early '80s, CEOs maybe made half a million dollars. I could deal with that, but now they're making billions. That's not right."

"I'm definitely voting for Obama," George said. "McCain is off the wall with his charges against Obama. This business with ACORN is really grabbing at straws. In 2000 and in 2004, they know they stole the elections. Obama was only a kid when this guy [Ayers] was involved in the turmoil of the 1960s."

"But I'm not a fool. I know that Obama and McCain, both of them are going to raise taxes. They just gave away a trillion dollars. Bush got us into the war and now the bailout; you'd be crazy--with the IQ of a carrot--to believe their talk about 'smaller government.' This government hasn't ever been so big."

"Black, white, Jewish, what have you; people have different opinions about America because of the social struggles they've been involved in. Talk to the Native Americans--we took everything from them. Talk to the Mexicans who come to this country just to trying to earn a living."

"There's still a good old boy network here. When I retire I'm moving out of the United States of America."



Craig

Craig works in sales in the automotive industry. "I'm in the auto industry. Chrysler and GM got a bunch of money from the federal government. I'm deeply involved with the Japanese automakers, and I can tell you, the US companies are still so far behind. Nobody's making any money in the auto industry."

"I'm for Obama. With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we've lost our standing in the world as a moral leader. The war in Afghanistan was backed by other countries, but then we went to play the preemptive role in Iraq."

"On the bailout, this business didn't just start. I heard that the Senate voted 95 to zero to deregulate the derivatives market. That was under Clinton."



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