

# SEP holds public meeting on Stockton, California bankruptcy

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The Socialist Equality Party held a public meeting in the city of Stockton in California's Central Valley on January 14. With a population of roughly 300,000, Stockton has been rocked by the financial crisis and is the largest city in the United States to file for bankruptcy in recent years.

An SEP campaign team spent several days canvassing working-class neighborhoods and leafletting at a local high school and community college. Campaigners were met with overwhelming support from the workers of Stockton, both young and old.

Stockton is located 80 miles east of San Francisco in the agricultural delta area where the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers meet the San Francisco Bay. For a time, Stockton had the nation's highest foreclosure rate and still has one of the nation's highest poverty and unemployment rates. Shantytowns and decaying apartment complexes make certain neighborhoods in the city resemble third-world countries.

SEP member Kevin Kearney delivered a report to the group of workers and youth who attended the meeting.

"Over the last five years, unemployment has skyrocketed, millions have lost their homes, once thriving neighborhoods have been reduced to ghost towns. The school system, healthcare and even basic infrastructure—roads, bridges, ports—have fallen into a marked state of disrepair," Kearney said. "Major American cities like Detroit and Stockton have begun to resemble the wreckage of what was once known as the 'third world.'"

"This drive to impose a brutal 'new normal' is not relegated to American workers, however," Kearney stressed. "The ruling class of every country, from Europe to the Middle East, has unleashed a relentless assault on the basic living standards of workers."

The report emphasized the role of the Democratic

Party, which dominates state politics and has imposed round after round of cuts to services upon which workers and youth rely.

"We see the other aspects of this assault everywhere we look. Nationwide, the Obama administration has used the fiscal cliff negotiations to introduce cuts to Social Security and Medicare. In California, Democratic Governor Jerry Brown signed a pension 'reform' bill last September that raised the retirement age for most new state employees from 55 to 67."

"The savage assault on workers' basic living standards will persist until workers develop their own socialist leadership in order to defend living standards, independently of the Democrats and Republicans, both bought and paid for by the financial aristocracy."

The focus on the international perspective of the SEP drew particular interest from those in attendance. Following the report, a question-and-answer session provoked discussions on the nature of US imperialism, the need to patiently explain the socialist perspective to the workers of Stockton and the world, the role of the trade union bureaucracies, and the SEP's emphasis on studying the historical role of the working class in the fight to build a revolutionary movement.

One worker in attendance, in response to a suggestion from the audience that the SEP hold regular meetings to educate the working class about the crisis of world capitalism, asked how this could be done.

Kearney explained that the Socialist Equality Party would be continuing its work in the community, and also emphasized the importance of reading the *World Socialist Web Site*. "The WSWS is the most important resource for education. If you feel that you need more information, that is what the website is for. You should read the website once a day for a couple of weeks and compare it to the other news sites. You will see the

difference pretty quickly. We are not Fox News and we are not CNN. We are the news source for the international working class.”

After the meeting, an SEP reporting team spoke with several of the meeting attendees.

A working-class mother said that she came to the meeting because of the impact the crisis of capitalism has had on her life. “We were on the other side of the income bracket, and when my husband passed away, I just saw how so much has changed... it has been by far the hardest. We went hungry because my husband died three years ago.”

Dale, a young community college student, explained that there is “a great need for socialism, especially in Stockton. Nothing has changed, even from the dust bowl. Young people are definitely receptive. People are still living at home because we can’t find a way out, and many are shackled by student loans.

“The struggle also needs to be international,” Dale said. “I don’t see this as a race thing, there are haves and have-nots. If all the have-nots from various countries got together, then—wow.”

Another youth, Shelby, said that the meeting was very informative. “It’s pretty bad out there. Something needs to change. I’ve had my own personal experience, and losing your home—that’s pretty bad. I wish I was the only one...”

The Socialist Equality Party also drew the attention of the local press with its recent political activity. The *Stockton Record*’s Michael Fitzgerald published an article, “ Communist viewpoint on bankruptcy ,” followed by a blog citing the recent WSWs article, “ Wall Street Journal demands ‘discipline’ for Stockton, California ‘deadbeats.’ ”



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