

Detroit workers speak against emergency manager

A WSWS reporting team
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There is widespread opposition among workers and young people in Detroit, Michigan to the appointment of an emergency manager to run the city. Kevyn Orr, who began his tenure last week, is tasked with using virtually unlimited powers to rip up labor contracts, slash services and sell off public assets to pay off the city's bond holders.

"Detroit is a prototype. It is a test," Micahyah Luke, a truck driver, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "It looks like they are trying to displace people" by driving them out of the city, he said. "It is basically self-supporting slavery."

"I think more people are becoming aware that there is an elite manipulating all of this," Micahyah added. "If we let them have the reins, they will run us into the ground. They have no money woes. They have so much money they can't figure out what to do with it."

"They try to make us think the election process works, but it is a smokescreen for what is going on."

According to city officials, the deficit of Detroit stands at \$337 million. This is less than the city has paid Wall Street banks since 2005 just to service the city's debt (\$474 million). Some of those who stand to gain the most from the emergency manager have personal wealth far in excess of the deficit, including Little Caesars' CEO Mike Ilitch (net worth \$2.7 billion) and Quicken Loans founder Dan Gilbert (\$1.9 billion). Both have been buying up property in downtown Detroit.

Greg, a retired Chrysler worker said, "The emergency manager is coming in to steal money. It's the same as the city council, but with a different face. He'll make more cuts to do it. I'm retired, so cuts to wages won't hurt me, but when they go after pensions, it will."

"I remember when Orr came to Chrysler," he said,

referring to the new emergency manager's role in the Obama administration's 2009 restructuring of the auto industry. "I left after the second bailout, when they really started bringing in the second tier workers. They wanted all the older workers out. Orr is going to make the same conditions for all Detroit."

A worker in the Detroit Department of Public Works spoke about the huge cuts that have already been implemented. "We are cut to the quick right now. We used to have 200 workers per facility, and now we are down to 100."

"They have reports in the newspapers about garbage collection being late, but the equipment isn't up and running enough to do the job properly. We are conscientious workers trying to do our jobs. We are the lowest paid in the country for what we do."

"The rich are trying to stay rich by keeping the poor poor. They always wanted just two classes, rich and poor."

Ken Johnson, a small business owner, said he was dismayed by what is taking place in the city of Detroit. "You have the right to work, but now there is an emergency manager. They are saying they are going to ravage this and cut that pension plan. Detroit is an indicator of the country's problems. It's a showcase about how terrible the system is."

"We don't have an auto industry anymore. They took the money and ran with it. Now we have casinos. A casino is not a viable industry. I am for whatever can be done to create jobs. If you don't have a basis for income, you can't support a neighborhood."

Angela teaches first grade at Martin Luther King Jr. Education Center Academy, a K-8 charter school. "They're trying to take my school. We don't have people backing us. Investors want to take the best of what we got and turn them into charters."

Angela went on to describe the economic situation she faces as a school teacher in Detroit. “I’ve been teaching for 25 years, and I should be at the part of my life where I can relax and live comfortably, but I still can’t afford to buy a house.

“I have a young daughter and three grown sons. One is a Marine, and another just got back from Iraq. I told him I can’t afford to support him, so he has to get whatever job he can find. He couldn’t find work around here, so he’s moved to Sandusky, Ohio.”

Discussing higher education, Angela said “It’s basically mandatory to get a master’s degree now if you want to find a good teaching job. But I did that, and now I’m in debt more than I ever have been in my life—over \$50,000. And I didn’t get a raise after getting my master’s.”

Alex, a young worker in Detroit, said, “Detroit is the epicenter of the cuts to social services.”

“I have mixed feelings [about the emergency manager]. I think someone needs to fix Detroit. The people we’ve elected aren’t doing it. But I don’t feel like [Michigan Governor Rick] Snyder should have done this, especially after it was just voted down.” The law allowing for the appointment of an emergency manager was overturned in a referendum last November, but the state government simply passed a new, virtually identical law, in December.

“I also don’t think race is an issue,” Alex added. “Orr is black but he works for the banks. I think that is the real issue.”



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