

Anger mounting in Detroit as bankruptcy plans begin to emerge

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Two weeks after Detroit's state-appointed emergency manager Kevyn Orr filed the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history, Orr's former law firm, Jones Day, has announced it will file an official "restructuring plan" by the end of 2013. As details of the plan emerge, Detroit workers have expressed outrage at the proposals.

Even as Orr claims there "is no money" to fund constitutionally-protected pensions of some 31,000 current and retired city workers, plans are moving forward to provide hundreds of millions of public tax dollars to fund a new Red Wings hockey arena and surrounding entertainment district owned by billionaire tycoon Mike Ilitch.

Orr unveiled a plan Friday to increase city employee health care deductibles three-and-a-half times, from \$200 to \$750. He is also soliciting about two dozen companies for the lowest bids on privatized garbage collection and recycling.

Among the other proposed cuts: The water and sewerage department is to be privatized; the city lighting department is to be sold to local utility monopoly DTE, who plans to remove half of the remaining street lights. Public assets such as Belle Isle Park, works of art at the Detroit Institute of Arts (Detroit's world-class art museum, which is free for tri-county residents), animals from the Detroit Zoo, and others are being appraised for possible sale.

Elgin, a city worker at the water and sewerage department, said of the bankruptcy, "I don't understand how they can do it. It's against the constitution. We haven't got any rights." Referring to the effect of deindustrialization on Detroit, he said, "Highland Park [the devastated enclave containing the now-closed historic Model T production plant] used to be like [the affluent suburb of] Bloomfield. But now look at it!

Detroit has been in decline for decades. Whether there is a Republican or Democrat in charge, there will be more and more poor people in this country."

Elgin said that with his current city job and benefits, he already struggled to pay utility bills to local monopoly Detroit Edison (DTE). "My lights and gas bill are \$250 a month. And if you can't pay it, they just shut it off. There's nothing you can do because it's a monopoly," he said, adding, "They used to talk about Russia being a place where people had nothing and no rights. Well what can they say now?"

Merry, who is disabled and works with victims of domestic violence, was angered by the eviction of residents from downtown to make way for a publicly funded entertainment district. "I also live in Section 8 housing, on the East Side," she said. "If you come over to where I live, it looks like a war zone. I've been broken into four times."

Referring to the Detroit's underfunded and inadequate public transportation system, Merry said, "I've protested at the city-county building against the horrible bus service. They are always late, and they sometimes leave disabled people because there are so many people on the bus already that don't want to make room for us in the reserved section. The bus drivers say there's nothing they can do."

Beatrice, a retired GM worker, was shocked that Orr was planning to cut city worker pensions by as much as 90 percent. "I don't agree with that. 90 percent! My sister is a city retiree. They won't be able to live! That's how it is though, GM has messed with my pension, too."

Omar, who is currently homeless and was waiting for the bus downtown on Larned Street, told WSWs reporters he was fed up with both political parties. He agreed that a new party of the working class was, "a

good idea. You guys should keep fighting for that. People need to get organized.” He said the Republicans and Democrats “are just trying to pull the wool over people’s eyes and scam them, and take more and more money without helping anyone. We’ve got to put our foot down and say we’re not going to take it anymore. We’d be better off running things ourselves. Enough is enough!”

Dujuan, who has worked making car seats at the Bridgewater factory for four years and now makes \$12 per hour, asked, “Where’s all the money? We have all these big companies and they supposedly don’t have any money. They’ve been making money off of this city for 100 years. The rich just want to keep draining everything. How come they’re developing only downtown? What about the rest of the city?” He added, “We need to start over, but this bankruptcy is not the way. They just want to screw the working people and the middle class.”

Samuel McCoy said, “The bankruptcy is a bunch of bull. They aren’t broke. They’ve got plenty of money. At least they’ve got plenty of money for jails! And what about that stadium that one billionaire [Mike Ilitch] wants to build? The truth is Detroit is a stepping stone. Once they’re done here, they’ll do the same thing in other cities.”

A senior who asked to remain anonymous said of the emergency manager, “People voted down that law last November, but the governor just went and pushed it right back through. I mean it’s sickening. They want to bring in more cops. Why? It won’t make us safer. Just look at STRESS. In the 70s, they used to have gangs of cops in the city that would just go around beating the living hell out of poor people. It kills me that they’ll bail out the auto industry and the banks but when it comes to Detroit, suddenly there’s no money.”

Christopher Kennedy said, “The bankruptcy is messed up. There’s so much crime in Detroit, but not because people want to do crime. It’s because there’s almost no jobs. Then, when you commit a crime, it makes it impossible to get a job. So what do you do then? Turn to more crime. If you give a person a chance they’ll make something out of it but nobody has given the people of Detroit a chance. It’s hard to even get paid minimum wage, and you need more than that if you want to raise a family.”

Referring to Orr’s plan to eliminate half of the city’s

remaining streetlights, Christopher said, “The city lighting is a mess. They have half or more of all the street lights turned off as it is. My wife is afraid to walk down the street at night.”



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