

Detroit voters speak out on bankruptcy, social conditions

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Detroiters Tuesday as they voted in the city's primary election. Voters turned out throughout the city to cast their ballots for mayor and City Council. The top two vote-getters in Tuesday's mayoral election will face off in the general election November 5.

Workers expressed widespread opposition to the financial dictator, Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, and the decision to throw the city into bankruptcy as a means of slashing city workers' pensions and privatizing city services.

Vanessa Jefferson, a social worker, spoke to our reporters outside the polling station at Henry Ford High School. Responding to Orr's statement published in the *Wall Street Journal* that Detroiters were dumb and lazy, she said, "I don't think it was too nice. A lot of the workers in the city are educated. He is expressing his own opinion. But I can tell you, you can't be lazy and work in the auto industry. It's clear he is unfamiliar with the work. Workers in the auto industry work under very difficult conditions."

Vanessa opposed the cuts in pensions and health care benefits for city workers. "These people work under difficult conditions," she said. "They promised them these pensions. They should make good on those promises."

Sandra Duncan, a retired auto worker, also expressed her opposition to the bankruptcy filing and the statements made by Orr. "We have been ripped off for so long; nothing is being done to improve the situation for working people," she said.

"I feel like you have to start over, but nothing is being done for the community. All of the money is going downtown and nothing is being done for the neighborhoods.

"The big issue in Detroit is jobs. There are no jobs

and those that are created don't pay enough for you to live on. The jobs they offer today are starter jobs, jobs you take as a teenager to get started, but not to live on for the rest of your life."

Referencing President Obama's auto bailout, which slashed auto workers' wages in half, Sandra remarked, "The cost of living hasn't been cut, but wages have. Fourteen dollars an hour is not enough to live on. A package of socks costs \$14.

"New cars cost 30 to 40 thousand dollars. How can a young person afford one of these cars? What do young people have nowadays? They go to school and there is no job for them when they finish. Most of them are living with their parents because they don't have the income to live on their own.

"I know people who are piling up on each other, three generations in a home. There used to be a time in Detroit when you could walk the streets at 3-4 o'clock in the morning and feel safe. You could even take a nap on your porch without fear of being attacked. Now, crime has tripled. The only thing they protect is downtown, not the neighborhoods."

When asked about the bankruptcy filing, Tracy Howard said she did not like to be too vocal, but none of it makes any sense to her. She told us, "They are getting rid of the jobs we need the most—teachers, firefighters, first responders. Then if we don't do anything about it they call us lazy. How can we come together outside of getting frustrated and angry? It seems like they are doing everything they can to keep us from surviving."

Tracy was especially concerned about the conditions facing young people in the city, commenting: "They claimed that the money from the casinos [there are three casinos in Detroit] would help finance the schools. But the schools are closing anyway.

“In the neighborhoods there is nothing for the kids. The playgrounds are closed; there is nothing for the kids to do.

“We tried to build a jungle gym but the city took it down. The kids created a basketball court in the street and the police forced them away. Now they can’t play basketball or football, so there is nothing for these kids to do except hang around, and that is just a formula for trouble.

“We feel like it is a set-up for failure. There is nothing available for kids except to get into trouble.”

Odyssey, an unemployed worker who has spent three years looking for work, voiced her disgust with the devastation of social conditions in Detroit. “I have two degrees from college, one in Psychology and one in Business Management,” she said. “My student loan debt is \$26,000 and at this point whatever job I get or any taxes I am owed get taken to pay off the loan. I have lived in the Detroit area all my life and am sickened by what I see taking place around me.”

She added, “I am outraged by the proposal to sell off the art at the DIA. They are selling the last things we have, like art and science. No one is helping us. Obama said he would not bail out Detroit.

“Why do they think there is crime in the city? If you push people down, what are they supposed to do to live? My friend told me that when Chrysler advertised 800 jobs, there were over 10,000 applicants.

“We definitely need a change.”



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