For a Workers Inquiry into the Attack on the DIA and the Bankruptcy of Detroit!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party

4 November 2013

For more information on the inquiry and to become involved, visit detroitinquiry.org.

The working class of Detroit is under attack. Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr is working with the bankruptcy court to destroy workers' social rights. If Orr has his way, pensions and health care for city workers will be gutted; wages and jobs will be cut; city assets, including the masterpieces at the Detroit Institute of Arts, will be sold off.

The bankruptcy proceedings are an antidemocratic fraud, with the conclusion decided in advance. All participants—Orr and Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, Detroit Mayor David Bing, the Obama administration and the trade unions—accept the premise that the working class must pay for a crisis that they did not create.

One of biggest lies is the claim that the attack on the DIA and the "monetization" of the art will help to protect pensions and avoid other social cuts. Orr and his coconspirators are out to plunder cultural institutions *and* pensions *and* vital services. The funds obtained by eliminating workers' access to culture will not go to the people, but to pay off the banks and bondholders.

It is time to fight back! In opposition to the bankers' inquiry underway in the court, workers and youth must organize their *own* inquiry into the crisis in Detroit and formulate their *own* response. The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are organizing the **Workers Inquiry into the Attack on the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Bankruptcy of Detroit** for this purpose, to be held at Wayne State University on Saturday, February 15, 2014.

The Workers Inquiry will answer such questions as:

• Why are workers being forced to give up pensions and health care to pay off the bondholders and banks? Who stands to benefit from the actions of Orr and the bankruptcy court, including the sell-off of art at the DIA and other assets?

• What is the source of the crisis in Detroit? How was Detroit transformed from the center of the world auto industry into the poorest large city in the United States, plagued by mass unemployment and the decimation of its public schools and transportation system?

• What measures must be taken to defend jobs, pensions, health care, the cultural heritage of the city and all the rights of the working class?

The Workers Inquiry will take testimony from residents as well as experts. It will gather reports from city workers, firefighters, auto workers, service workers, retirees, students, artists and professionals. Inquiry commissioners will examine the finances of Detroit and expose the way in which the city has been looted by giant banks and is now under the thumb of wealthy bondholders.

The Inquiry will be conducted in opposition to the entire political establishment, Democratic and Republican. Orr, a Democrat, was appointed by Snyder, a Republican. From the beginning, the two parties of big business have conspired to use the bankruptcy courts to evade the state constitution, which protects public worker pensions. The mayor and the local Democratic Party establishment, after presiding over the devastation of Detroit, have voluntarily abdicated political power. They are concerned only that they get a portion of the spoils.

The Obama administration is openly backing the bankruptcy and has submitted a motion in the bankruptcy court opposing efforts to halt it. The White

© World Socialist Web Site

House used Detroit as a model for the privatization of public education and the slashing of manufacturing workers' wages. Now it will be a testing ground for a nationwide attack on health care and pensions.

The trade unions, politically aligned with the Democratic Party, are opposed to any mobilization of the working class. In court proceedings, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the United Auto Workers (UAW) are the most adamant in demanding that the city sell off assets. AFSCME and the UAW have criticized Orr for refusing to accept the unions' proposal to impose another $100 million in concessions on their members.

The contempt these organizations have for the workers they claim to represent was summed up by a comment from a local AFSCME official, who justified the sale of DIA art by saying, "You can't eat art." The union executives hope that at least of portion of the proceeds from the sale of artwork and other public treasures will wind up in their own pockets.

It is time for the voice of the working class to be heard! A counteroffensive in Detroit will resonate throughout the country and around the world. Popular anger is mounting against levels of inequality not seen since the Great Depression and a system that insists that workers must give up everything even as the banks and Wall Street speculators amass unimaginable levels of wealth.

In the wake of the 2008 crash, the ruling class all over the world has carried out a policy of social counterrevolution, aimed at forcing the working class to pay for the bank bailouts. In Europe, conditions of workers have been thrown back decades. Detroit is the Greece of the United States, showing what is planned for every city.

On October 4, the SEP and IYSSE organized a demonstration to oppose the attack on the DIA. The rally drew hundreds of young people and workers from throughout the region—a powerful initial expression of the *real sentiments* of the vast majority of the population.

The demonstration rejected all threats to the DIA and all cuts to pensions, health care and other social rights. It was organized independently of and in opposition to the trade unions, the parties of big business and the capitalist profit system that they defend. It insisted that only through the independent political mobilization of the working class to defend *all of its rights* can the plans of the corporate and financial elite be opposed.

The Workers Inquiry is the next stage in the Battle of Detroit. We call on all workers and young people to take part in the fight to build the inquiry. Organize delegations from your factories, workplaces, schools and neighborhoods to attend on February 15. Visit the web site detroitinquiry.org for more information on the campaign and to sign up to become involved.

Inquiry Details:

Saturday, February 15, 2014
10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
Wayne State University
General Lectures Building, Room 150
5045 Anthony Wayne Drive, Detroit, Michigan
Map

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site