

Wayne State University students speak on Detroit bankruptcy

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Students and workers at Wayne State University on Wednesday spoke about the political situation in Detroit and the call for a workers inquiry into the attack on the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) and the bankruptcy of city. The inquiry, sponsored by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, is scheduled for February 15, 2014.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to students as the proceedings in the US bankruptcy court continues, with the fate of the city's population being decided behind their backs by a cabal of investment bankers, judges, big business politicians and trade union bureaucrats. The inquiry is aimed at gathering information on the real causes of the city's financial crisis, who stands to benefit from the looting of the DIA, other city assets and pensions, and how the working class can oppose it. (See: "For a Workers Inquiry into the attack on the DIA and the bankruptcy of Detroit!")

Students expressed deep anger at these attacks, as well as rising tuition costs and the breakdown of the city's transportation system. Many expressed interest about the inquiry being organized by the SEP and the IYSSE.

Maurice Dortch, a 31-year-old student taking classes in political science and social studies, said, "We need money for schools. They are constantly raising tuition here at WSU. So many college students come out of school with tens of thousands of dollars in debt, just for undergrad. They are holding us back, and making us pay a fortune for the tools we need to succeed. And, even with a degree, we can't find jobs."

Referring to the two political parties in the US, Maurice said, "They're all liars. I am sick of all the wars. War is unnecessary, but the rich benefit." He added about the Detroit bankruptcy, "I think its ridiculous to take the pensions. Those workers are overworked and underpaid already. They're making back room deals and excluding

the public from having a voice in the process.

"The working class makes the businesses thrive, while the rich sit back and enjoy. Our society is run by the wealthy. The wealth is passed down from generation to generation, and we work for them. That's how it has been for a hundred years."

Pat White, a film major at WSU, denounced the efforts to strip Detroit workers of their pensions, and spoke about the economic situation facing youth. "They worked for those pensions. [Emergency Manager Kevyn] Orr and [Governor Rick] Snyder have no right to take that money. It was promised to the workers. This is an ineffective answer to a deeper problem," White said.

In sharing the experience of a friend, White touched on the conditions facing an entire generation of youth, which are being forced to work for starvation wages in dead-end service sector jobs. "My friend works at Jimmy Johns, and he is basically a slave. They schedule week to week so he cannot make any plans in advance. He works long hours as a manager, but barely makes more than minimum wage."

Stefan Carter, a long-time Detroiter and auto worker, spoke about his experiences in the auto industry and the transformation of the trade unions into instruments of corporate management. "They are trying to flip the city. The city is value, now they want to take all that value for themselves. I've been here in Detroit for 38 years, and it's the worst I've ever seen."

"The city is in bad trouble. The bus drivers are scared. The buses don't work. A lot of people are hungry, they have no income and no hope.

"Those workers worked all their life for the pensions. The numbers have obviously been fixed to favor bankruptcy. The city has money, the state has money, and the wealthy have money. But there's none left over for us."

He continued, "I was in the UAW for 13 years. The

plant I worked in was a meat grinder, using up workers and spitting them out. “I came back one day and the jobs were gone to Brazil. The unions aren’t what they used to be. My pay went from \$27 to \$14, which is a poverty level wage. The prices of everything are going up, but the wages keep going down.”

Darina Kindell, a WSU student who depends on financial aid to pay tuition, told the WSWS, “During the government shutdown, students on financial aid were worried we wouldn’t get to go to school. A good amount of us could go to Ivy League schools, we’re smart enough, but we can’t pay. Tuition is going through the roof even here at Wayne.”

Sam Grocik condemned recent moves to sell off the priceless treasures housed in the DIA. “I’m very much against selling the art work. It’s a public trust, and they are violating it. They don’t care about the interests of the public.”

Carla Hardor is a manager at KFC. She said, “I want to know where the money went because it didn’t go into the city. I want to know why it’s so hard to find a decent job with decent pay. I’m a working mom—I have kids. The food stamps cuts don’t help me. And I’m a full-time student. But they don’t like that. They want me to work full-time and not be on assistance. How do I work full-time, take care of a child and go to school? They blame people if they don’t improve their own lives but if they take their benefits away and make them work full-time then how are they supposed to improve their lives?

“In regards to the DIA, why should we have to give up our art? It’s a treasure! It’s one of the last great things that haven’t been ruined and they want to sell it? And it’s not just the art; they’re also cutting the libraries all the time too. Detroit has so little right now and they want to take what little is left and sell that as well. I don’t understand it,” Hardor said.



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