

Detroit workers denounce bankruptcy ruling and attack on pensions

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As Judge Rhodes issued his ruling Tuesday morning in the Detroit bankruptcy case, workers outside the courtroom expressed anger and disbelief at the decision. In addition to allowing the bankruptcy to go forward, Rhodes explicitly ruled that city worker pensions, protected by the state constitution, can be cut.

Ernest Johnson, a retiree with 34 years at the Recreation Department, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “All of this is a way of punishing the retirees. If you are making \$2,000 a month from your pension, and this thing goes through, you are lucky if you take home half of that,” Johnson said.

In a roundtable discussion with the *Detroit Free Press* Tuesday afternoon, Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr confirmed that his team will not distinguish between pensions and other liabilities, in accordance with Rhodes’ decision. “Contractual rights in every bankruptcy I’ve been involved with have been adjusted,” the emergency manager said.

“Whether it’s an airline or a pension, they are subject to adjustment...It doesn’t really matter what I think, it doesn’t matter what the law provides, because there is no money,” Orr said.

Don Gay, a retired Chrysler worker, said that the bankruptcy is part of a criminal operation targeting the working class in Detroit. “This is a total fraud. There has been no discussion on the real finances of the city. This is a setup by the big banks to take over this city.”

“They are going to do a lot more. This is just the beginning. I think they are also out to change the core dynamics of the city. We the people have to find a way to not be ruled by a handful of folks at the top,” Gay said.

Mashuk, a retired city worker who worked for the Water Department for 34 years, said, “I’m against the entire set up. I believe we are going to a place where

there is going to be the rich and the poor. I don’t think they care any more about the people. The people don’t have a voice. Any time they take an emergency law, turn around and put it in again and this time do it through an appropriation bill so that it can’t be voted down, that is really a slap to democracy.

“Your voice has no meaning in this society anymore. The rich want to control everything,” Mashuk said.

Amru Meah, an engineer who has worked for the city for 32 years, said, “I’m shocked and in awe by the decision of the judge. I’m shocked that he treated pensions the same as contracts and claimed that cuts to pensions do not violate the state constitution.

“So yes, I am shocked. I thought the state constitution would protect our pensions. Now he ruled that even the constitution will not protect pensions. They are just stealing from the workers.”

Leonard Weems, a Department of Transportation bus driver who retired in 1996, said, “This is a rotten shame. You put in all these years and you want to relax, but now you have more worries than when you were working. Why are they saying we don’t have the right to a pension?

“A lot of people die from sicknesses, but some of us make it. And now they want to take away our survival.

“The unions don’t have any authority. Ever since Reagan fired the PATCO air traffic controllers it has been going down hill. The unions have become businesses.

“I don’t buy this about there not being any money. They are taking more money away from workers and giving Mike Ilitch hundreds of millions for new hockey stadium,” Weems said.

Nebraska Pierson, a retired Chrysler worker, said, “It’s a shame—they keep taking away from all the working people. To say there is no money is a lie. The

auto companies are making billions and not giving any of it to the communities. They're just taking money away.

"All of them are working together against workers, including the judge. This shows you can't win by taking these people to court.

"I agree that a workers' inquiry is needed because the truth needs to come out," Pierson said, in response to WSWs reporters who explained the proposal for a Workers Inquiry into the Attack on the DIA and the Bankruptcy of Detroit (See, detroitinquiry.org).

"If they start here with destroying pensions it is only a matter of time before they do it everywhere." Expressing opposition to the unions' support for the selling off of the artwork of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Pierson added, "The art belongs to the city."

During his discussion with the *Free Press*, Orr expressed a different perspective, saying, "We'd like to find some way to monetize that [the DIA]." Orr said he expects an appraisal of the DIA's most valuable 500 pieces within two weeks, though he cautioned that the sale of these assets will raise less than \$2 billion.



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