

Supporters of Detroit Workers Inquiry hold meeting with tenants facing eviction

Our reporting team
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On Saturday, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a meeting with tenants at the Griswold Apartments in downtown Detroit to discuss the February 15 Workers Inquiry Into the Attack on the DIA and the Bankruptcy of Detroit. Residents at the 127-unit, 12-story residential building are facing eviction as part of the plans by real estate developers and the city's emergency manager to gentrify the downtown and Midtown areas.

Larry Porter, SEP assistant national secretary and member of the inquiry organizing committee, explained the conception of the inquiry and its initial findings to students, supporters, and Griswold tenants attending the meeting.

Porter outlined the undemocratic nature of the bankruptcy proceedings and in particular the ruling that pensions had no special protection, regardless of what is said in the state constitution.

"The ruling of the bankruptcy court has no legitimacy," he said, adding, "The entire process has been a political conspiracy involving top officials of both the Republican and Democratic parties, including the Obama administration. As early as March 2011, the road map for taking cities into the federal bankruptcy courts in order to circumvent state constitutional protections of pensions was written by lawyers at the bankruptcy firm Jones Day. One of their partners, Kevyn Orr, was selected as emergency manager, i.e., financial dictator and front man for the banks."

In Judge Steven Rhodes' oral summary of his ruling, Porter noted, the federal judge completely ignored evidence presented in his court that Orr falsified the financial position of Detroit and inflated pension liability figures to provide a pretext for the bankruptcy filing. He also pointed out that Rhodes disregarded the

explicit language of the state Constitution, which says pensions "shall not be impaired or diminished," in order to give a green light to the gutting of pensions in Detroit and beyond. After admitting that Orr had not negotiated with retirees, unions and other creditors "in good faith," Rhodes nevertheless concluded that bankruptcy case had been filed "in good faith" and that Orr had no "ulterior motives."

Alberta Moore, an attendee, interjected to ask Porter if anyone at the hearings spoke on behalf of the workers and pensioners in Detroit. Porter explained the interests of the working class were completely excluded from the bankruptcy proceeding, noting that that labor unions supported the bankruptcy and the selling off the treasures of the Detroit Institute of Arts in order to get a portion of the spoils for the union executives.

"When the interests of the ruling class are involved, legality and constitutionality mean nothing. The government and the courts will rubber stamp any crime so long as the banks and the rich can pocket everything while workers get nothing."

Porter then took this opportunity to counterpoise what the Workers Inquiry was setting out to do. He explained that workers must have the information they need to expose the corporate and political forces behind the bankruptcy and prepare the means to fight it.

Debra, a tenant and retired auto worker, explained the meeting. She said, "We don't understand how the bankruptcy works. Governor Snyder and Judge Rhodes are taking away our rights. How can they violate them right in front of us? People need to wake up, stop being afraid, take off work and come to this inquiry. I want to organize seniors to come and testify. I want these people exposed and whose pockets they are in. And how we can protect our rights."

Jacqueline, 68, is a lifelong Detroit resident and a

Griswold tenant who has raised six children. She said, "Detroit was a beautiful place to live. My children attended the schools here, which used to be very good. People had jobs, nice houses, nothing like it is now. The city government stole so much money that was for the people. I think these things should be brought out. How such a beautiful city could end up like this. I still have faith in Detroit."

Wardell is a retired Housing and Urban Development worker who attended the meeting and will be at the Inquiry on February 15. "Besides being blatantly unfair, it really irks me that the judge can just take away the rights of working people just like that. The entire process is anti-democratic and has been done in the state of Michigan time and time again. Workers voted in a ballot against the Emergency Manager law and the state legislature repackaged the law in another form to put it through. The same thing happened with the right to work laws. The whole thing seems so surreal to me.

"They take polls and over 70 percent of the population say they are opposed to pension cuts and the selloff of the DIA art but the state and government do it anyway. They are going to great lengths to destroy what we have. The thing that I am wrestling with is how this is going to be changed. That is the reason I plan to attend the Workers Inquiry. Have we reached the point in this society where a big change is necessary? This is the issue for me.



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