

SEP and IYSSE hold meeting at Wayne State in Detroit to discuss campaign for Workers Inquiry

A WSWs reporting team
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The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality held a public meeting at Wayne State University Thursday evening as part of the campaign to build for the Workers Inquiry into the bankruptcy of Detroit and the attack on the DIA and pensions to be held February 15.

The meeting was attended by students, workers and retirees, including a delegation of tenants facing eviction from the Griswold Apartments in downtown Detroit.

Lawrence Porter, the assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, gave the main report. Porter began with a review of the world situation. “We are living in extraordinary times with similarities to the 1930s. We have an economy that is in drastic decline, the policies of the ruling class are turning more and more to dictatorial forms of rule against the working class and there is the ever-present danger of a major war with catastrophic consequences.”

He continued, “In my remarks today, I want to concentrate on why the Socialist Equality Party is calling for a Workers Inquiry into the bankruptcy of Detroit. You may recall that on October 4 we held a protest at the DIA that was attended by 500 people. It was the only demonstration called in defense of the DIA and we made the point, in opposition to the unions, that the defense of culture was bound up with the defense of pensions and all rights won by the working class.”

He noted that the bankruptcy of Detroit was the product of a years-long strategic plan. “The Inquiry will examine how this crisis developed, the legal arguments used to justify the bankruptcy, the financial swindles involved in the crisis in Detroit, the

importance of culture and the DIA, and the history of Detroit and how this struggle can be taken forward.”

Porter then used a slideshow presentation to review some of the facts that the work for the inquiry had uncovered so far. To begin with, Porter stressed, the bankruptcy was the product of an anti-democratic conspiracy hatched behind the backs of working people. To support this, he cited letters and e-mails between Michigan Governor Snyder and others as well as the testimony at the bankruptcy court itself.

He noted that Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr had directly lied to pensioners, telling them their pensions were “sacrosanct,” when in fact he was preparing to demand massive cuts.

Turning to the latest developments, Porter explained that the proposal by Governor Snyder to use \$350 million in tobacco settlement money to avoid cuts to pensions and the DIA was a cynical ploy. “The proposal is neither a defense of pensions nor is it to save the art at the DIA,” said Porter.

“Many of the details have yet to be revealed. However, what is clear is that the aim of the proposal is to get the unions to agree to more cuts and to drop all lawsuits. They have admitted the proposal will not ‘make the pensioners whole,’ and at best it will ‘soften the blow’ of the pension cuts.” Concerning the DIA, Porter added that the plan will be to turn the publicly-owned museum over to a private company that will inevitably prepare cuts.

Following the presentation, Porter took questions and comments. In response to a question about the origins of the conspiracy to push Detroit into bankruptcy Porter explained, “They see Detroit as a test case. There is an enormous amount of money tied up in pensions that the

rich would like to see go into their own pockets.” The ruling by the bankruptcy judge, said Porter, would not just affect Detroit, but set a precedent for the whole United States.

Another worker asked how this conspiracy could be defeated. An SEP member explained that the question was the development of an independent movement of the working class in opposition to the Democrats and Republicans and the unions. “The bankruptcy judge is trying to find the right price to buy the support of the unions for pension cuts. Only the independent mobilization and initiative of the working class can defeat this.”

Other questions raised in the course of the discussion touched on the role of various pseudo-left organizations in providing a cover for the Democratic Party and the unions and the use of racial politics to divide the working class.

After the meeting the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Diane, a retired Detroit Public Schools teacher, who explained why she planned to attend the Workers Inquiry. “I want to understand thoroughly what is going on. The media doesn't tell the truth.

“Lawrence hit it when he said they are stealing pensions and our public assets. They denounce our pensions as ‘entitlements’ as if we didn’t work all our lives for them. What Orr is doing now started with the attack on teachers’ pensions by the emergency manager over DPS.

“I grew up in the Brewster Projects. It wasn’t Camelot, but people stuck together and looked after each other in the 1960s. Things have gotten so bad in Detroit because so many jobs were wiped out. It’s no surprise you have crime and people are scared to go out when there is so much unemployment. That’s why they have the police and the prisons because this system doesn’t give young people a future.

“But the rich think they are entitled to, and deserve to take everything. Then they hold up the wealthy and say, ‘don’t you want to be like us?’ Well no, I don’t want to be a billionaire. I don’t want to take from others to get rich while kids don’t have enough to eat.

“Like Lawrence pointed out in his presentation—the richest one percent control 46 percent of all the world’s wealth. 85 billionaires have the same amount of wealth as 3.5 billion people.

“The media, the textbooks, don’t want us to know

history—how the unions started right but how the later leaders carried out anti-communist purges to throw out the socialists who built the unions. That’s because the socialists got in the way of their dealing with the capitalists.

“I learned that your party, the Socialist Equality Party, is based on the original socialists, the legacy of the founders of the socialist movement.

“Everything has to do with class. Not race—they don’t want us to know that. That’s because those on top want to keep us at the bottom by any means necessary. It reminds me of how Hitler took over.”



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