

Defend Detroit water workers' jobs!

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The following statement was issued by Lawrence Porter, the assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the chairman of the Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit and the Attack on the DIA & Pensions (detroitinquiry.org).

Workers throughout the Detroit metropolitan area must oppose the plan, revealed by the *Detroit News* Wednesday, to eliminate 700 jobs at the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) over the next several months.

The elimination of 40 percent of the department's workforce is the opening salvo of massive job cuts, along with the gutting of pensions and other benefits, that will be at the center of the Plan of Adjustment soon to be released by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr. Along with workers' pensions and the artwork of the Detroit Institute of Arts, the financial aristocracy has eyed the DWSD—one of the largest municipally owned water and sewerage systems in the US—as another jewel for the taking.

Orr has been pushing a plan to “regionalize” the water department, which would be the first step for the wholesale privatization of the system. The slashing of the workforce and dumping of workers' pensions will make the department even more attractive to the financial sharks.

Kenneth Buckfire, an investment banker hired by the Snyder administration and a key player in the conspiracy to throw Detroit into bankruptcy, testified during the court proceedings that private equity firms were greatly interested in the water system as long as they were free to raise water rates.

Experiences in the US and internationally have demonstrated that subordinating the distribution of water—the most precious resource on the planet—to the drive for private profit inevitably leads not only to price-gouging, but also to catastrophic public health disasters. This was underscored by the recent chemical spill by

the West Virginia American Water (WVAM) utility, which left hundreds of thousands of area residents with toxic water.

The path for the attack on water department workers has been laid by the betrayals of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and their pseudo-left supporters in the leadership of AFSCME Local 207.

Well aware of the deep opposition among workers to the gutting of their jobs and living standards, Local 207 leaders, including former president John Riehl and current vice president Mike Mulholland, called an isolated walkout in 2012. Opposing any struggle to mobilize the working class against AFSCME and the Democratic Party, the local 207 leaders quickly capitulated to the union bureaucracy, including AFSCME Council 25 President Al Garrett, who went to the picket lines with the court order to demand strikers return to work.

AFSCME and the other unions are now involved in intense behind-the-scenes talks with federal mediators, the Snyder administration and wealthy private foundations to come up with a “grand bargain” supposedly to defend pensions and the DIA. In fact, the bankruptcy court is looking for a deal, in which millions will be channeled into investment funds controlled by the union executives in exchange for their support for Orr's plan to slash jobs, pensions and other benefits.

Throughout the world, workers are facing savage austerity cuts and the destruction of democratic rights, while the wealth of the world's billionaires has more than doubled since the Crash of 2008. While handing trillions to the Wall Street banks, the Obama administration has flatly rejected any bailout for Detroit. Instead it has backed the bankruptcy in order to set a precedent for the attack on workers across the country.

All workers—in Detroit and the suburbs, throughout the US and internationally—must unite to defend our social rights. The defense of jobs and pensions, the right to culture and clean water requires breaking the dictatorial grip of the banks and big business over society. That requires the development of a mass political movement of the working class for socialism and the reorganization of society to meet the needs of the many, not the wealthy few.

The SEP is organizing a Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit and the Attack on the DIA & Pensions to uncover the truth and arm workers with the knowledge they need to fight back against these attacks. I urge workers and young people to attend this critical event.



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