

“We have to be conscious, think, plan and unite”

Detroiters endorse Workers Inquiry, denounce bankruptcy

WSWS reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers and young people this week who explained why they were planning on attending the upcoming Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit and the attack on the DIA & Pensions (detroitinquiry.org).

Detroiters denounced the record-breaking levels of social inequality, the domination of society by a plutocracy, and the complicity of the unions in the attacks on living conditions. There was widespread interest in the Workers Inquiry and general agreement among workers about the need for real information to educate the working class politically.

Stephen, a former master plumber for the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, was severely injured after being buried alive in a workplace accident. The city is using the bankruptcy to cancel his workers compensation settlement.

“I’m coming to the Inquiry to get more information about what is happening financially. You can’t get any truth from the news—just look at who owns Fox News and the other stations. We have a right to know what is going on with our money because the pensions are our money!”

“The media says if the banks have to take a haircut then so should pensioners. But we didn’t make any corrupt deals like the banks. They knew what they were doing was illegal. Laws were broken, and they were loan-sharking the city, but [Emergency Manager Kevyn] Orr is still trying to pay them off.

“What Obama is doing is a travesty—he is so blatantly pro-Wall Street. They bail out billionaires but won’t help poor retirees. The banks want to get our pensions. I had relatives in the skilled trades who asked me why I was working for 20 percent less for the city of Detroit. Well, we worked for that promise of pensions and benefits, which we knew would be there when we retired. Now Orr

is cutting pensions and dumping retirees onto so-called Obamacare.

“I know a firefighter in his 80s, with a wife in her 70s. They are losing all their health care. They don’t get Social Security—all they have is a pension. Like me they are thinking of signing up for catastrophic coverage for \$600 a month. Between them they would have to spend \$19,200 on health expenses before a dime would be covered. But he is only getting \$1,400 a month in pension; that means he and his wife effectively have no health care and can’t get it.

“A whole lot of workers, especially from the Water Department, should be down at the Inquiry. They want to make the water department a totally for-profit operation and get rid of hundreds of jobs. It takes years of training and education to get a job as a chemist at a water plant; they want to send that to private contractors with two weeks training.

“The politicians don’t give a damn—they are millionaires. [Quicken Loans CEO Dan] Gilbert is another crook, and [Little Caesar’s CEO Mike] Ilitch’s new hockey stadium, which we are paying for, is BS. I read that even all these techies who have come to live downtown to work for Quicken Loans are being forced to move because the rent is getting too much for them.

“The politicians have played the race card so long in Detroit and the suburbs to turn people against each other. This isn’t about black and white.

“The unions have been corrupted too and have changed their purpose. They used to fight for the rights of workers, to insure our best interests, but no longer. They represent the interests of the employers, the CEOs and the businessmen who run the unions. When they get power, like [former AFSCME 207 President] John Riehl, they say, ‘I got mine, to hell with you.’

“Everything is for the rich. What are the kids going to do? There are no jobs. What is it going to take—an insurrection to change things?”

Kathleen, a young restaurant worker, said, “I attended the demonstration at the Detroit Institute of Arts that was called by the Socialist Equality Party. I thought it was ridiculous to sell the artwork, and I didn’t know why the city was in bankruptcy in the first place. I read more about this on the *World Socialist Web Site*, how corporate profits were rising when unemployment was high. It didn’t add up or make any sense.

“People have lots of questions that haven’t been answered for no good reasons. The Workers Inquiry is being organized by an independent movement that is not connected to the any of the political parties that are in power.

“By getting involved in the building of the Inquiry, I learned that is it not just one group of people being affected—it is everyone. They tell you everything is your fault, but you’re not the only one who is losing your job or your house. Lots of people are in the same struggle. When I campaigned in Eastern Market I heard stories about pensions being cut, people losing jobs, young people struggling.

“The people in charge are saying that the bankruptcy will be helpful for the people living in Detroit. This is not true.

“It’s scary because the people in political power, who say they are helping us, are actually against us. I read that the unions are in on it too. If people knew that they would want to fight, that is why the media keeps it quiet.

“This is not just happening in Detroit. After they declared bankruptcy, the state legislature in Illinois passed a law attacking pensions. Detroit is just the first one to go. We live in a global economy. If one thing happens here, it will happen there next.

“It’s awful to see the way they try to pit people against each other, with race and stuff like ‘the Mexicans are taking our jobs.’ But I see a bigger realization, especially among young people. They see that the wealth gap is growing, that they are leaving college \$80,000 in debt and without a job. They can’t raise a family and instead are moving back home, and their parents can’t afford it because they are getting their wages and pensions cut.

“This is making people realize that there is something wrong when the city hands a huge piece of land to a billionaire for one dollar and finds millions to build him a new hockey stadium but not to pay pensions they worked for.”

Dianne Crawford, a social worker who formerly worked in the Detroit Public School system, explained why she plans to attend the Detroit Inquiry while visiting Eastern Market.

“I am here with my two beautiful great grand nieces, Zariya and Saniya,” she said. “I am coming to the to the inquiry because I want them to have a future.

“Taking Detroit into bankruptcy was planned for a long time and was done intentionally. The entire system is set up for the greedy to take from the needy.

“They have been doing this for a long time mainly because the unions and self serving politicians are united and have worked against the people. They are like the family and friends club who work together not only to continuously exploit working people but to create as much confusion as possible. They want workers to be afraid and lose any hope in the potential for struggle.

“As a social worker, I see what they do each day. They are taking money from mothers and children, depressing wages and making things impossible for college students who are saddled with debt and cannot get a decent job.

“Corporate America is now the law of the land. I am attending the inquiry because we have to be conscious, think, plan and unite.”

Christian, a student at Oakland University, who registered for the Inquiry online, said, “I have been reading the WSWs for a number of months and watched the video posted about the Inquiry. It is very good and explains what is being done to workers and young people in the City of Detroit. It’s crazy what is being done to working people. The attack on the art and pensions is not just an affront to workers in Detroit, but will affect everyone in the surrounding areas and will hit especially hard at young people.

“The growth of inequality is giving young people a look at things as they really are. We are living in a world that is rigged for the rich. It is a system that only benefits them. I feel that that we need to organize on a mass scale and start educating people, and that is why I plan to attend on February 15th.”

To register for the Workers Inquiry, visit detroitinquiry.org.



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