

“This country could have a revolution”

## Detroit Inquiry attendees denounce attack on workers' rights

WSWS reporters  
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*The WSWS spoke to many of those attending the Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit (See, “Workers Inquiry examines political conspiracy behind Detroit bankruptcy”). Further interviews and the reports to the Inquiry will be published on the WSWS in the coming days.*

Following the Workers Inquiry, workers and students spoke on the meeting, denouncing the Detroit bankruptcy and the attack on the rights of the working class.

Norma, a retired city worker who lives in assisted housing in downtown Detroit, said that the Inquiry was “very informative.” She continued, “We’ve been sold out in so many ways. We know [Republican Michigan Governor Rick] Snyder is our enemy, but the Democrats have betrayed us just the same, to gain a fortune for themselves. And the unions get in bed with management, too. How crooked they are!”

Norma emphasized the importance of a report reviewing the history of the class struggle in Detroit. “We can’t forget where our forefathers came from, the struggles they had to go through to earn a decent life. The guilds and the early unions, although there was of course some nepotism, did actually organize workers to defend their rights.

“We’re returning to the days of royalty. These new billionaires are like the court under Louis XIV. They’ve got all this wealth on the backs of working people. But this country [America] could have a revolution, too!”

Norma said she had already cashed out her pension from the city of Detroit before the bankruptcy was initiated, but she strongly opposed the attack on pensions. “They’re punishing these people. These men

got jobs as firefighters with a promise to get a pension when they get to old age. It’s a disgrace. They sacrifice everyday to fight fires. I know people who have lost family members in house fires. I can hardly believe the arrogance.”

Norma agreed with the call for the political independence of the working class. “Breaking with the Democrats is exactly what it’s going to take to fight against this,” she said.

Adam, who attended the Inquiry from Washington, DC said, “What was stunning was the sweeping illegality of the Detroit bankruptcy. Tom Carter presented a powerful case. He compiled the evidence of Detroit’s political leadership’s collusion with the Jones Day law firm. It was a premeditated and forced bankruptcy. He showed how the state constitution prohibited the ‘diminishing’ or ‘impairing’ of pensions and yet how they worked to get around this thorn in their sides,” Adam said.

“On the national level, corporations have been stripping and flipping companies, so they saw Chapter 9 as an available route in Detroit,” Adam added. “They set up the Emergency Manager law, but then it was shot down by a referendum. So they reinstated the law, but added appropriations onto it – a legal loophole to prevent it from being struck down again. This was done to give undemocratic, dictatorial powers to Kevyn Orr as emergency manager. All of this was completely illegal.

“The political implications of this are apparent. You see Republican Governor Rick Snyder together with lifelong Democratic Kevyn Orr, who was also connected with the Obama reelection campaign. Finally, Obama allocates millions of dollars to support

the removal of blight in Detroit and Dan Gilbert, who will benefit, is put in charge.

“The Democrats and Republicans and media are all implicated. It is a giant conspiracy against the working class,” Adam said.

Willie H. Griffin, Jr., vice president of the Griswold Apartment Tenants, was part of a delegation of tenants facing eviction next month to make way for the gentrification of downtown Detroit. They have been given until March to leave.

Willie said that the building in which they lived was already being renovated for its new tenants, creating added hardships for the current residents, many of whom are older and disabled.

“The contractors are in, working on the 4th, 11th and 12th floors, yet they have a permit only for the 6th. We’ve got asbestos in the air and water problems. Our people have breathing difficulties, and yet they are already working. We are trying to get an injunction to stop this construction,” he said.

“I am a UAW guy. I worked at Consumers Gas for 10 years and at Ford Motor Company Rouge plant. But UAW Vice President Jimmy Settles sold us out there. I left at \$28 an hour, and now they are bringing in new guys at \$15/hour, and they are cutting the benefits.

“The unions no longer look at the truth. You, here at the Inquiry, are telling the facts. Families do not have a fair and equal opportunity any more. Dan Gilbert and Rick Snyder are not allowing us to live.”

“Barack Obama is a snake,” Willie added. “He says one thing and does another. He is a disgrace; he only has respect for multibillionaires. We found out today where the money is going. These are tax abatements on our backs. I support you guys all the way.”

A Detroit Public School teacher who wished to remain anonymous commented, “The people overturned the emergency manager law. We told them we didn’t want it.”

“I think capitalism has run its course,” she added. “It can no longer serve human needs. What grabs me is that there is no opposition. Both the Democrats and Republicans are in cahoots with corporate America. What they want—artwork, public education, etc.—they just take.

“There is no voice for the working class. This is why people are so confused. It is a two-party dictatorship. They are making the working class and poor pay for the

crisis they had no hand in. This stuff is illegal. I did not know that they are paying out \$40 million a year to the banks for the SWAP agreements...hundreds of millions of dollars altogether.”

“I am amazed at the degree of corruption,” the teacher said. “Judge Rhodes condoned it. The Obama administration said OK. It’s collusion and the illegal violation of the Michigan Constitution. None of them are held accountable.”



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