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Workers, youth speak on the significance of the Detroit Inquiry

WSWS reporters
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The Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit and the attack on the DIA & Pensions was held on February 15, 2014. The WSWS published an initial report [here](#) and initial interviews [here](#). We will be posting the main reports in the coming days. Below we publish additional interviews from Inquiry attendees.

Saul Simoliunas, president of the Sanitary Chemists and Technicians Association at the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, said, “The material at the Inquiry was great. It debunked all the myths about the Emergency Manager and the bankruptcy.

“We chemists came here today to show the danger to public health if the city of Detroit reduces the number of chemists in the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD),” Simoliunas said. “It will be unsafe. People’s health will be in danger and they will have to boil water. The city will save money but the people will have to pay a lot more.”

Simoliunas pointed out that cuts to the Water Department have created a situation where “the Detroit River is not drinkable, swimmable and fishable today.

“Our department is down to about 64 chemists for the whole Water Department. They say they want to reduce that number to only 15 chemists. Ann Arbor has five, for a plant that is 40 times smaller than Detroit’s.

“The bankruptcy is not only making Detroit poor, it is making us unhealthy. That is the net result. In fact the regulatory agencies should be looking into this because of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. This is not the private business of the DWSD and the city.”

Linda, a mental health care worker, said, “I agreed strongly with the reports that the Detroit bankruptcy

was a conspiracy. The voters were completely left out of it. It reminds me of the stolen election of 2000. The voters went for Gore, but Bush was put in.

“Everything is being made for profit, including hospitals and schools,” Linda added. “They are not about human need. If you have no insurance, the hospitals say ‘go die.’ Mental health insurance covers you for maybe a week in a hospital and you are released, ready or not. There have been \$14 million in cuts to mental health in Michigan by the Snyder administration, which is forcing people to go onto Medicaid in order to maintain their services.

“The patients are being downgraded. There is no voice for the mentally ill. They are at the whims of the insurance companies.

“The bankruptcy of Detroit is similar,” Linda said. “They are taking our city services and it is all behind the scenes. I was surprised at the amounts of money the city is paying to banks for the SWAP agreements. It is all going for financial speculation.

“I agreed with the conclusion. We need to educate more people. We have to know who we are fighting here.”

Wardell Montgomery Jr., an artist and writer living in a senior apartment near Belle Isle spoke on his reasons for attending the inquiry: “I’m concerned about the city and what is happening to it. I’m concerned about the world and how it is all connected.”

When asked about the political significance of the Inquiry, Wardell said, “People are looking for alternatives. What is being said here, people will really appreciate.”

Regarding the presentations, Wardell said, “All of them were excellent. Politically, there is nothing I can really disagree with.”

Trevor Staley is a student at Wayne State University, majoring in sociology. “All of the speeches were incredible, in particular, Tom Carter’s.”

Trevor spoke on the failure of the capitalist system and the necessity for socialism: “Even more so now, the two-party system has completely failed us. I have lost all faith in it. What is needed is a socialist movement, not reform. We need a political education.”

When asked about the significance of the possible privatization of the DIA, Trevor said, “Art is the best way I have been able to get a grasp on human conditions. The selling of the art is the worst human atrocity.”

Larry, a retired truck driver, worked 40 years for Wayne State, said, “We already lost our pensions. They were replaced with special retirement accounts that always pay less than traditional pensions.

“The presentations today showed the institutionalization of the breaking of the pension system. Younger people will not have any pensions, if things continue the way they are. I liked the reports because they put things in an historical perspective. These are conscious decisions, not simply the result of blind forces. Jones Day, Orr, Snyder, these are all agents of the owning class.

“To the ruling layer, anything that is not commoditized, whether health, schools or water is a waste,” Larry said. “Anything not producing profits is considered waste. These people are getting rich from the wars. There has been a massive shift of public wealth to support the warfare industry.”

Charlie said, “The bankruptcy is a nationwide issue. The SEP, the IYSSE, these groups are putting on the most dynamic responses to the crisis. I went to the October 4 demonstration [against the sell-off of DIA art]. The plans for the DIA are a total slap in the face to the people and culture of Detroit.”

He added, “The WSWS is where I get my news.”

Chris, an 18-year-old musician from Harris Michigan, said, “I thought the Inquiry was profoundly enlightening. It offered very specific insights and tore away the deceptions around this issue. Culture is very important. It makes us more sensitive on many levels.

“The youth have a big fight on our hands. Our

generation needs political knowledge. It is extremely important.”



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