

Moratorium Now protest in Detroit: A cover-up for bureaucrats, Democrats

Workers Inquiry Chairman Lawrence Porter
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On April 1, a demonstration of a little over 200 retirees, workers and opponents of the bankruptcy proposals of Detroit's emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, was held in front of the US Federal Courthouse in downtown Detroit.

The event was not intended as a genuine mobilization of the working class. It was organized by Moratorium Now, a group set up by the pro-Stalinist Workers World Party (WWP), to support the unions that have betrayed the interests of both working and retired city workers.

Moratorium Now is known for its opportunist alliance with the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union and sections of black Democratic Party politicians. It functions as a phony "left" cover for the bureaucracy and the Detroit's political elite, who are working to enforce Orr's austerity measures and paralyze any struggle of the working class.

The event coincided with the submission deadline for letters of objection to the cuts to be filed with the federal bankruptcy court. Moratorium Now and the unions encouraged the illusion that pleading to US Bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes would make a difference in his rulings.

Speakers at the rally included Ed McNeil, head of the retiree division and special assistant to the president of AFSCME Council 25, and two longtime leaders of the WWP, attorney Jerry Goldberg and David Sole, a retired city worker. Many other union officials were also on hand, including Al Garrett, president of AFSCME Council 25.

In the eyes of many workers, the unions are discredited. They proposed \$180 million in concessions to keep out the emergency manager, accepted cuts that resulted in the reduction of 25 percent of the workforce

in 2012, and made it clear to the courts that they would not challenge the legitimacy of the bankruptcy.

At the rally, McNeil said one of the major concerns of the union was the demand by Orr to remove union appointees from the pension board. The unions oppose this demand, not to protect the retirees, but because the pension board is a lucrative slush fund for union officials.

McNeil himself is notorious for calling for the selloff of the artwork at the Detroit Institute of Arts. He told this reporter in October, following a court hearing, that "You can't eat art," reiterating the hostility of the unions to the defense of education and culture for the working class.

As for Moratorium Now/Workers World, they can only be described as habitual racialists, who are dominated by racial conceptions and various forms of identity politics (gay liberation, women's rights, etc.)

Goldberg, for example, in an analysis of the crisis in Detroit called "Detroit bankruptcy: War on Pensions!" praises former Detroit mayor Coleman Young as the city's first African American mayor, covering up for the massive cuts he carried out against the working class in Detroit.

"Under the leadership of African-American mayor, Coleman Young, and the predominantly African-American city council, the city was able to stabilize and by the early 2000s, property values were rising and the neighborhoods were reviving," Goldberg writes.

This is a lie made up out of whole cloth! Coleman Young carried out massive cuts in Detroit and cultivated a black elite while the conditions of the working class worsened terribly.

After the bankruptcy of Detroit, Young's fiscal austerity measures are now being hailed by the local media as the highpoint of the postwar government

policy. The *Detroit Free Press*'s investigative report on the Detroit crisis, "How Detroit Went Broke," notes that Young "was an astute money manager who recognized, early on, the challenges the city faced and began slashing staff and spending to address them."

The article continues, "Young was the most austere Detroit mayor since World War II, reducing the workforce, department budgets and debt during a particularly nasty national recession in the early 1980s."

Other figures cited in this article: "Detroit cut about 6,000 workers from 1978 to 1984, according to financial records reviewed by the Free Press. During his two decades as mayor, he also cut about 2,000 Police Department employees and about 500 Fire Department employees."

The crisis in Detroit is primarily the product of the breakdown of capitalism and the turn of the financial elite from an economy based on industry to one dominated by financial speculation and the stock market. During the 1980s and 1990s corporations moved industry out of the US to break the power of the working class and to search internationally for cheap labor. Detroit's crisis is one of the sharpest expressions of this national and international phenomenon. The problems facing Detroit are similar to the problems plaguing other "rust belt cities," including Buffalo, Bethlehem, Baltimore, Milwaukee, Gary, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown, and Pittsburgh.

The unions don't have an answer to the crisis because they support the profit system. They are more than willing to give pseudo-left organizations such as Workers World a platform, as long as these groups cover up for the unions' betrayals.

While there is no question the banks and corporations promote racism and social division, the fight against these scourges has always been seen by Marxists as part of the fight against capitalism as a whole. After all, the ruling class promotes these views is to divide and weaken the working class.

The racist views of groups like Workers World are not only reactionary, they also express a deep pessimism about the ability of the working class to understand this society and rise to the demands of this period. Coming out of the Workers Inquiry we have found that not only are workers looking for serious answers to complex problems, the best sections

recognize there is no quick answer outside of the study of history, economics and Marxist philosophy.

The Socialist Equality Party has dedicated itself to resolving the most pressing problem facing the working class—the recruitment and education of a class-conscious leadership.



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