

Detroit Workers Action Committee meeting opposes water shutoffs, bankruptcy

WSWS reporters
11 September 2014

On Tuesday evening more than 40 workers, students, retirees and youth attended an emergency meeting of the Detroit Workers Action Committee (DWAC) on the campus of Wayne State University.

After a period of discussion, a statement titled “Fight water shutoffs and the bankruptcy of Detroit!” was voted on by those present and passed overwhelmingly. The statement, which will be distributed throughout the city, calls for an independent political movement of the working class to oppose the Detroit bankruptcy, take the profit out of utilities and ensure water as a social right.

Socialist Equality Party Assistant National Secretary Lawrence Porter introduced to the DWAC resolution. He explained that the bankruptcy process is supported by the entire political establishment, Democrat and Republican, and is being overseen by bankruptcy court judge Steven Rhodes, Democratic Party Mayor Mike Duggan and Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr.

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department has resumed shutting off water to residents after a one month “pause.” Rhodes, who said that the shutoffs “gave the city a black eye,” sought to create the political conditions to intensify the attack on workers and retirees.

“The SEP called this meeting to begin to organize a struggle against the attacks being carried out by every level of government to destroy rights that workers won through decades of struggle,” Porter explained.

“The shutoffs express the real aims of the emergency manager and the bankruptcy. Contrary to the claim that this is being done to rebuild Detroit and help the citizens of the city, it is being carried out to destroy long held rights they could not destroy another way.”

“What is taking place in Detroit is a conspiracy and a social crime,” Porter added. “It is taking place in

Detroit, but this is only the beginning. The ruling class wants to use the city as a model for the rest of the country.” He cited in particular the moves to use the bankruptcy courts to override constitutional protections against city worker pensions.

Porter reviewed the experience of the SEP and IYSSE in opposing the bankruptcy, including the protest against the privatization of the Detroit Institute of Arts in October and the Worker’s Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit held in February.

“The bankruptcy of Detroit is a conspiracy supported by the Obama administration, and is part of a national and international counterrevolution against the rights of the working class,” he said.

Porter then put forward the DWAC’s program for opposing the bankruptcy and water shutoffs.

“We are calling for the formation of an independent mass movement of the working class. Working people cannot stop the attacks by making appeals to the courts, the Democrats, the Republicans or the trade unions. All of them are working together.

“We call for an independent movement. What does that mean? Independent of the bourgeois parties. The Democrats and Republicans defend the capitalist system. They are absolutely united against the working class.”

Porter called on those in attendance to fight to build the DWAC to organize the working class and prepare for mass action, including a general strike throughout the Detroit area.

The introduction was followed by a period of discussion on the details of the DWAC’s program.

Nathan, a Wayne State University student, asked how workers could combat the mass media, which is in lock step with the bankruptcy and the policy of water shutoffs.

Porter responded by explaining that workers must look to the *World Socialist Web Site* as an alternative to corporate media outlets. "We fight the media, and we have our own media, the WSWS," he said. "The Detroit news media are corporate conglomerates that promote an agenda in the interest of big business. They support the bankruptcy and the cuts, and they are being discredited."

Willie Griffin, the President of Garden View Estates, reported that in his buildings there are more than a thousand residents who often have issues with access to water as well as electricity.

Phillip, a Wayne State student, asked about the SEP's position on the People's Water Board organization and the tactic of civil disobedience, such as physically blocking trucks being sent out to shut off people's water.

Porter made it clear that the SEP does not agree with the People's Water Board. "The People's Water Board has endorsed Democrat John Conyers and works directly with the Democratic Party," he said. "We are calling for something very different. We are calling for a real mass movement of the working class."

Leona, a retired worker from Detroit, asked what was meant by the working class and how the profit could be taken out of utilities.

Jerry White, a writer for the WSWS, responded by emphasizing that the working class is the majority of people in the United States and internationally. "Through our collective labor we produce all society's wealth," he said. "But we have no say in how that wealth is distributed. The Democrats and Republicans are controlled lock, stock and barrel by the elites."

"The water department is supposedly a publicly owned utility," White continued. "However, 50 percent of the revenue goes to pay for debt servicing to the banks. The banks currently control the water department. They have been shutting off people to get rid of the bad debt.

"Money is not being used to repair the water mains that are breaking apart or to provide pensions; it is going to service the debt of the bond holders. Workers must take control of these utilities and put them under the democratic control of the working people. Utilities must be run on the basis of human need, not private profit.

"The building of this committee and the turning out

to the working class is the only way forward. Not by diverting the anger of the workers behind the unions or the Democratic Party."

Attendees spoke to reporters from the WSWS after the meeting.

Abby, a 29-year-old New York resident, attended the meeting to learn about the social issues in Detroit. "I've read statistics before about social inequality, but this meeting has invigorated my anger at our current situation where so many people go without their needs being met, and towards the financial elite that facilitate that want. I am very moved by the call to action that was made; I found it very inspiring. I'm going to find a way to become involved."

Duaa, an undergraduate student at Wayne State University, found the meeting to be very revealing. "I've heard a lot of things that I had never heard before. I was on the fence about the bankruptcy before, I thought maybe it had to be done because of necessity. Now I realize that it was pushed by the rich, and they're the ones who will benefit from it. After going to this meeting I want to be a part of the fight against the bankruptcy."

Jonathan, a part-time faculty member in the Wayne State University English department, said he found the meeting to be extremely encouraging. "It's great that there were so many people here today. I don't know who else will be here next week, but I'll definitely be here. I've considered myself a Marxist in the past, but sort of in a theoretical sense. I didn't feel like I was a genuine Marxist, but in coming to this meeting and seeing that there is a group doing something, I'm hoping to add practice to the theory."

Gabriela, an undergraduate student at Wayne State studying anthropology, expressed her support for the work of the DWAC. "It was good to hear the call to action as opposed to just hearing empty rhetoric as I have in some other places. Workers committees are necessary. I think people may be a little apprehensive, they may fear for their jobs. But when you're fighting for your rights, you have to make sacrifices."



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