

“This is a dog and pony show”

Retirees speak on Teamster pension cuts

A WSWS reporting team
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Teamster retirees at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan on February 8. The retirees came to attend a public forum sponsored by the US Department of the Treasury on the proposal by the Central States Pension Fund to slash benefits under provisions of the Kline Miller multistate Pension Reform Act of 2014.

The bill, signed into law by President Obama, opens the floodgate for attacks on retiree pensions covering some 10 million workers in private industry.

The event, hosted by US government “claims czar” Kenneth Feinberg, was entirely ignored by the corporate media. It was designed largely as a vehicle for allowing workers to vent their indignation under conditions where the implementation of the cuts is foreordained.

Workers interviewed by the WSWS expressed outrage over the cuts, directing their anger at the political establishment and the Teamsters union.

Michael, a retired driver with 30 years, traveled over 200 miles from Cadillac, Michigan to attend the hearing. “It is going to be a big cut for me; approximately 50 percent. It will be a big change. I really don’t want to think about that.

“There is a lot of money going into the economy from these pensions. It is going to hurt a lot of people. If I would have known this was coming, I would have worked a little longer.

“Years ago, after the Teamster corruption scandals, the government put in their own people to oversee the pension fund. To me, that makes the government responsible. They were supposed to make sure things were working the way they should.”

Frank, another Teamster retiree, said, “It’s a dog and pony show. At the end of the day it doesn’t matter how many retirees say ‘no,’ if this guy [Feinberg] says that

it is the law, then what’s the point of any of us going up there and saying anything? We can say ‘no’ all we want, if it’s just the law then we’re going to lose no matter what.”

Richard, a Teamster Local 299 retiree, said, “The way I read the letter they sent me they are cutting me \$300. They said it would go from \$2,000 a month to \$1,700.

“People make plans, they base their lives on it. You are making a \$3,000 a month pension and cut that in half, what is the effect of that?

“Fortunately for me my wife is still working, and the pension cut won’t devastate me. But some retirees aren’t even eligible for Social Security.

“At the last job where I worked I went seven years without a wage increase. We put autos on trains. That’s when the Teamsters were giving all these sweetheart deals. They were still collecting dues, but the new hires weren’t getting a pension at all.

“I retired in 1991. I was only 55, but I had 30 years. They are doing to our pensions what they did with Social Security. They took the money out, but never put it back in.”

Mark, another Teamster driver, retired after almost 40 years, said, “They are going to take one-third of my pension. It means the same for me as everyone else. They are taking a third of my livelihood and tossing it out the window.

“At this age, no one will hire you. They would throw away my job application.

“In my mind, a pension is supposed to be secure. Instead, they take your money, gamble and lose it, and now you pay the price.

“In the trucking industry the work is brutal. By the time you make it into your sixties you are beat up. You do a tough job all your life thinking you have a safety

net. Then you find out it isn't there.

“There should be no ifs, ands or buts. Instead, 10,000 guys' pensions are gone. See you later. When you work for a union company, retirement is part of your wages. This is something they are supposed to owe you.

“There is a difference between how bankers and rich corporations are viewed and us peasants on the bottom. When banks were in a hurt, they were given money. This whole thing leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

“There are a lot of things happening that are just mind boggling. They change the rules just to benefit themselves.”

Ike told the WSWS that he went to work for General Motors in 2007 after working 23 years as a driver for former supermarket chain Farmer Jack.

“I took a day off work so I could come here.

“I started at Farmer Jack in 1984. I am being told that my pension is being cut 70 percent. I will get \$789 when I was going to get \$2,200.

“Someone older than myself, who is not able to work, how can they survive? They were guaranteed these funds. Those responsible should go to jail. They were bailed out, but not us.”

Ted, a UPS driver for 30 years, said, “This is absolutely devastating. We've worked hard our whole lives and built these companies.

“Cuts like these are going to force us to change our whole lifestyles. This country has billions and billions of dollars, there is more than enough money to pay our pensions. I mean, they bailed out the banks in 2008.

“I don't want anything more than what I worked for. It's not just me who would be affected. A lot of us have kids and grandkids who will be affected by this. I think there are a lot of people who are responsible for this. The main ones are the government. I mean, I heard that Congress passed this bill in eight minutes. And then Obama signed it. And who ever heard of it? Nobody told me, or any of these people. I think the Teamsters really let us down here.”

Jack, a retiree with 37 years in the trucking industry, said, “They made promises that they're not keeping anymore. I retired 11 years ago because of a bad back. I can't go back to work.

“Sitting behind the wheel 12 hours a day can't be good for anyone. The same thing that happened to my back is going to happen to our kids, but instead of

being behind a wheel they'll have you working behind a computer screen 12 hours a day. I think both political parties are responsible. And the Teamsters are responsible. I know they bailed out companies with pension money—companies that then went bankrupt.”



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