

“Educated Workers are Dangerous Workers”

Support builds for the Workers Inquiry into Detroit bankruptcy

By our reporting team
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With a little more than a month to go until the Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit and the Attack on the DIA & Pensions (detroitinquiry.org), the Socialist Equality Party has stepped up its campaign to raise awareness about the event among workers, youth and retirees. Last week, SEP members and supporters reached workers at auto plants and the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, and campaigned among students at Wayne State University, where the February 15 Workers Inquiry will be held.

On Thursday, an SEP team spoke with Chrysler workers at Warren Truck Assembly Plant, where they distributed brochures exposing the conspiracy behind the bankruptcy. A veteran Chrysler worker who has been following the WSWs coverage of the bankruptcy registered to attend the inquiry. Many workers expressed anger over the destruction of city workers' pensions and the looting of the artwork of the Detroit Institute of Arts even as the banks and corporations are making record profits.

With 2013 profits reports due to come out soon, Chrysler, like the rest of the Detroit automakers, is flush with billions in cash while thousands of young auto workers are laboring for wages, which, in real terms, are the equivalent of the \$5-a-day wage introduced by Henry Ford 100 years ago. Over the past two months, the SEP has been holding biweekly meetings of workers and young people who have joined a committee to build the Workers Inquiry. The chairman of the Workers Inquiry, SEP Assistant National Secretary Larry Porter introduced last week's meeting by explaining the recent testimony of Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr who acknowledged that the “interest rate swap” deals foisted on the city in

2005-06 were probably illegal. Nevertheless, Orr is proposing to hand over \$165 million to Bank of America and Swiss bank UBS to unwind the deals, while offering just pennies on the dollar to pensioners.

After discussing these developments, the committee decided to redouble its efforts to reach out to different sections of the working class and student population, including a rally to be held on campus at WSU this coming Thursday.

Campaigning at Eastern Market on Saturday, a team of SEP supporters spoke to shoppers about the ongoing bankruptcy process and the rampant criminality of the financial elite.

“The situation is terrible,” Lindel Johnson, 74, said. “I majored in business back in an era when you were taught that you were supposed to have principles. They are making bribe deals with the pensions. Business ethics doesn't even exist in the government anymore. Nobody has gone to jail for the wrecking of the economy in 2008. In fact, these people, who were top political fundraisers, were betting against the housing market and playing both sides.”

Johnson connected the attack being carried out against the working class in Detroit to the criminal foreign policy of the US government. “Look at what they did to Gaddafi in Libya,” he said. “You can see that they were playing both sides and when they didn't get what they wanted out of him, they did him in. The corruption is deep.

“They just put in Janet Yellen at the Fed,” Johnson said, referring to confirmation of the new Federal Reserve Board chairman who is committed to continue the policy of handing tens of billions of dollars over to the big banks every month. “They put new people in,

but the system doesn't change," Johnson concluded.

The team also spoke with Nejashmen Page, a substitute teacher who told the team she has \$130,000 in student loan debt. Nejashmen said she will never be able to pay off the debt given the lack of well-paying, full-time jobs.

"I have a double bachelors in political science and a masters degree, and I can't find full-time employment. I work as a substitute teacher. I know lots of people with advanced degrees who can't find more than a part-time job, making 10 or 11 dollars per hour," Nejashmen said.

"I am definitely going to look into this Inquiry. We need to have scientific knowledge about this thing. We're not going to get it anywhere else—not from the media or the court, that's for sure.

"Education is what it's all about. But they don't want us to be educated, because educated workers are dangerous workers."

Retiree Ernie Lester, 84, also spoke with reporters. He said, "I practiced law for 20 years in Detroit. I've known a lot of mayors. Do you know how many ended up in jail?" He added, "My guess about who's going to get rich off the bankruptcy is Barclays bank."

Referring to his experiences during the Great Depression in the 1930s, he said, "My grandmother used to live near where this market now stands," Ernie noted. "Every Saturday at 5 pm, my brothers and I had to come here if we wanted to eat. We scavenged for leftover potatoes and vegetables that the farmers left behind. We had an outhouse, no electricity."

Ernie showed the SEP team a photograph of a homeless Detroit man, explaining that the portrait moved him because he looked like so many older residents he knew and, he said, he was worried by the severe deterioration of social conditions in the city. The SEP team spoke on the need for a revolutionary solution to the social crisis.

"Leon Trotsky stepping off that train in Russia spelled the doom of the Romanov dynasty," Ernie commented. "Socialism will stand around for a long time to come—the greatest good is the good for the greatest number of people.

"There's been a steady diminution of the incomes of those at the bottom and increase of those at the top," he said. "That needs to change."

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