

“The Democrats conspired with the Republicans on this”

Auto workers, bus riders, denounce Detroit bankruptcy ruling

By Zac Corrigan
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Over the weekend, Detroit workers continued to voice their opposition to the Detroit bankruptcy plan approved by Judge Stephen Rhodes on November 7. In a landmark ruling, municipal worker health care and pensions are to be cut—the latter in violation of the Michigan state constitution—and the city’s assets will be hived off to the very businesses and financial institutions that drove the city to ruin.

Vaughn Oliver, a lower-paid second-tier worker at Warren Stamping, told the WSWS that he had previously worked at Awrey Bakery, which filed for bankruptcy in 2013. “They said they would call us back, but they never did,” Vaughn said, referring to what happened to the bakery workers.

“What they did in Detroit was corrupt,” he added. “I don’t like the situation from the mayor [Democrat Mike Duggan] all the way on down. It seems like the rich always find a way to profit. The retirees should have been taken care of. Instead, they paid the banks. That wasn’t good.”

“It’s crazy,” said Eric Hade, another auto worker. “But there is always a cycle in history. The rich will end up paying for their arrogance in the end.” Another worker said his wife was a suburban bus driver. “Just like in Detroit they are always contracting out. They are trying to take away everything and workers are losing everything.”

WSWS reporters also spoke to bus riders at State Fair Transit Center and Rosa Parks Transit Center, two major bus transfer stations at opposite ends of Detroit. Sixty-one percent of Detroiters do not have access to a personal vehicle, and they rely on the oldest fleet of buses of any major city in the country. Many workers must regularly wait for hours each day for buses to

arrive.

Bob Grier, a retired medical assistant now taking computer classes to try to get a job to supplement his income, said, “They used the bankruptcy court to override the constitution and cut pensions. My friends who are city employees worked to earn that money. It’s like a slap in the face!”

“This city used to be great,” he continued. “We used to have good jobs. Now it looks like a ghost town out here toward Eight Mile Road. You can hardly live in Detroit anymore. The trash doesn’t get picked up half the time. In parts of the city you’ll call the police and it might take three or four hours for them to come. And you have to wait hours for the bus! I have been here for two hours in the cold waiting to catch a bus.”

Grier said in order to fight for their interests, “workers need to get organized. Everyone in Detroit—Muslims, Chaldeans, blacks, whites—needs to come together. Right now, I don’t trust any politicians. Everything is done for the wealthy. What we really need is jobs, houses, funding assistance for families with children.”

Walter, a retired Detroit Water and Sewerage Department worker, is one of the many whose pensions are being cut as a result of the bankruptcy. “I support my wife and my daughter who is in college,” he said. “We’re losing 4.5 percent of my pension, and I’m not yet clear on how much we’ll lose through this claw-back deal, but it’s going to have a big impact.”

“The bankruptcy is a blueprint for what they’ll be doing across the country. The Democrats conspired with the Republicans on this. It’s about privatization instead of control by the people—instead of democracy.”

Andre Clark, a dish washer, said “The bankruptcy shows how greedy officials who get put in their places give things away to the people who supported them financially, while cutting the pensions and health care of the regular people they are supposed to represent. I realize now it was never about what the people want; it’s all about *their* interests. And unless we step up and do something they’re going to keep doing this to us.”

Clark said he thought the government was “just waiting for something to happen and then the next thing you know it’ll be martial law, like in Ferguson, but the whole country this time.”

Speaking of the Detroit’s public transportation system, Andre said, “It takes me four hours to get to work on bad days. It’s ridiculous. The M-1 [rail system, currently under construction] is not serious. When I first heard about it, I imagined it would take people all the way out to Pontiac like a real public transportation system. But it’s only going to go from Downtown to Midtown. It’s to take you to your car so you can drive back home to [the wealthier suburb of] Bloomfield—not useful for most working people.”

When another rider complained that the bus drivers were also rude, WSWS reporters pointed out that new drivers were paid just ten to twelve dollars per hour. Andre was surprised by this, and replied, “Wow, no wonder they are irritated. I’d be irritated too if I was driving buses and making only that much. That’s about what I make washing dishes!”

Kimberly McConnel, who works as a security guard, moved her family to Detroit from Chicago because of the high cost of living and gang violence. She said the bankruptcy process showed how “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. And the rich are getting richer by taking from the poor. I think a big strike would be a good thing. I hope it happens really soon. There’s no organization amongst the workers at my job. They don’t want us to get organized.”

Lori, a pharmacy technician who supports a daughter in college, said, “I am often late for work because the bus was 40 minutes late or more picking me up. I have just had a performance review at work and my boss’s main point was my lateness. It’s getting me into trouble. And buses only get slower in the winter.”

Chris, a worker at Wendy’s, said, “I don’t understand how a thriving city can go bankrupt. What happened? Big budget movies are being shot here all

the time. Where’s that money going? It’s not going to fix the roads or buy more buses. People like me have to take two to three hours to get to work.”

Glenn, a former carpenter, is now working toward a General Educational Development (GED) diploma at Wayne State, where he hopes to study Electrical Engineering. He said he opposed both the Democrats and Republicans. “I didn’t vote for either party in the [November 4] election. I’m more interested in taking action independently.”

When WSWS reporters explained that the Socialist Equality Party had set up the Detroit Workers Action Committee (DWAC) to fight for the mobilization of the entire working class against the attack on the democratic and social rights of workers, he responded, “It’s good that there is a committee being organized to fight against all these cuts. I think it sounds like the way to get on the right path.”

The SEP calls on workers and young people in the Detroit metropolitan area to join and build the Detroit Workers Action Committee (DWAC). For more information, see <http://socialequality.com/dwac>

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>