

Event commemorating one year anniversary of Detroit bankruptcy breaks up in debacle

By Niles Williamson
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A public meeting Wednesday night marking the one year anniversary of the conclusion of the Detroit bankruptcy ended abruptly in the face of repeated protests from the audience.

Held at Wayne State University in Detroit's Midtown neighborhood, the event brought together some of the key players involved in the conspiracy to loot the pensions of tens of thousands of retired city workers and eliminate their health care benefits, including Republican Governor Rick Snyder and bankruptcy judge Steven Rhodes. Detroit's Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan was scheduled to appear before the program was cut short.

Expressing the ruling elite's contempt for the residents of Detroit, the program was a highly scripted public relations event entirely devoid of substance. It was moderated by Detroit Public Television's Stephen Henderson and Christy McDonald who oversaw a particularly shallow discussion of the bankruptcy and social conditions in the city. Henderson and McDonald repeatedly scolded the protestors in the audience.

The real social and economic conditions facing the majority of the city's residents went entirely unaddressed by the conspirators who were paraded across the stage for what was intended to be a public victory lap.

There was no discussion of the latest estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau which show that between 2009 and 2014, amidst the so-called economic recovery, median household income in the city of Detroit fell by a staggering 20 percent from \$32,493 to \$26,095. Or that at the same time the poverty rate increased by 6.6 percentage points, from 33.2 percent to 39.8 percent.

Neither did they address the approximately 3,000 customers that were threatened with water shutoffs last month. The auctioning off of 3,500 owner-occupied

homes in one of the largest mass tax-foreclosure sales in U.S. history in September and October was also not on the agenda.

In an attempt to maintain the highly scripted and superficial character of the event, questions were not allowed from the floor. Instead, posts were culled by moderators from Twitter and other social media platforms where those in attendance were encouraged to post their inquiries online with the hashtag #DETNEXT.

A number of videos were screened that hailed the return of essential services such as street lighting and consistent trash pick up to a limited number of neighborhoods. That the streets are no longer dark in some areas of the city was treated as a great victory.

The bankruptcy of Detroit, the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history, was intended as a blueprint for slashing the living standards of workers and retirees throughout the country and internationally.

Rhodes is now serving as an advisor to the government of the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, which is seeking to shed its debt obligations, even though it cannot legally declare bankruptcy. Former emergency manager Kevyn Orr, the bankruptcy lawyer who shepherded the process, went on to advise the emergency manager of Atlantic City, New Jersey.

The first conspirator to be interviewed was Republican Governor Rick Snyder, a multi-millionaire venture capitalist. To facilitate the bankruptcy and speed up the privatization of city services, Snyder appointed Orr as the emergency manager of the city of Detroit, abrogating the democratic rights of the city's residents and stripping the elected city council of most of its power.

In an entirely vacuous discussion, Snyder told the interviewer that he was "proud of what happened here"

with the emergency manager and the bankruptcy. He praised the bankruptcy for “providing a platform to stabilize services and create an environment for growth and success.” The governor proposed helping impoverished and unemployed Detroit residents by providing them with micro-loans.

Protestors interrupted the event throughout the night. Many of those involved in the protests were part of groups around the local Democratic Party officialdom. One such group, called Moratorium Now!, organized a demonstration outside the event. However, they also included some retirees and workers outraged over the consequences of the bankruptcy. Some of the protests centered on issues of race—used by local Democrats to obscure the class issues at stake in the bankruptcy—with a number in the crowd chanting “Black Lives Matter” during Rhodes’ appearance.

During Snyder’s interview, a number of audience members rose to protest the dire social conditions which persist for the majority of Detroit’s residents. A mother denounced the fact that wages were too low for workers to afford to put food on their table. Another audience member stood to protest the closure of public schools throughout the city.

Following the governor’s appearance, Henderson took the stage to chastise those who protested, declaring that their actions were “not Detroit behavior.”

Snyder’s appearance was followed by a panel discussion which included Shirley Lightsey of the Detroit retired City Employees Association, a union affiliated organization which gave its approval to the looting of benefits. She declared that while many retirees remain disappointed with the significant cuts, they are “going on with their lives.”

Judge Rhodes, who infamously ruled that there is no “fundamental right” to water, was the last person to be interviewed before the event was abruptly ended. He glibly backed up recent comments in which he claimed that the city’s bond holders had done worse in the deal than the city workers who had their pensions cut. He argued that all of the city’s creditors had to “take a hit” in order for the city to have a “fresh start.”