

“It is leading Detroit into another dark age”

Detroit workers react to plans for financial control board, more budget cuts

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Michigan governor Rick Snyder has given the Detroit City Council until March 27 to ratify a “consent agreement” establishing an emergency financial control board to take over the finances of the city.

Under terms of the governor’s proposal, state financial aid to ward off bankruptcy is contingent on setting up what amounts to a bankers’ dictatorship over Detroit. The financial control board, largely appointed by the governor, would have the power to tear up and rewrite union contracts and impose draconian budget cuts, including the sale of city assets.

According to reports, the city of Detroit will run out of cash to pay its bills sometime in May. If the City Council refuses Snyder’s proposal for the appointment of a financial control board, the governor indicated he is prepared to appoint an emergency manager to take over city finances. Under provisions of a bill enacted last year, which is now under challenge through a referendum process, emergency managers were given expanded powers over the finances of local government bodies.

The renewed threat of more cuts has produced shock, dismay and anger among working people in Detroit. The city has already suffered one round of devastating cuts after another. The official unemployment rate in Detroit is more than 30 percent, and child poverty stands at more than 50 percent. Bus transportation barely functions. The Detroit Fire Department has instituted a system of rotating closures of fire companies, or “brownouts,” due to manpower shortages.

An emergency manager already runs the Detroit Public Schools. Over the past three years, dozens of schools have been shut down, driving tens of thousands

of students out of the district or into for-profit charter schools.

While Detroit’s Democratic Party mayor Dave Bing and the City Council are voicing opposition to Snyder’s plan, all agree that working people in Detroit must pay for the city’s bankruptcy. Bing has already negotiated massive concession deals with city workers’ unions and has begun laying off 1,000 city employees, including bus drivers and mechanics. The City Council has proposed even more drastic cuts, including more than 2,300 layoffs. Among the jobs targeted are those of hundreds of Detroit firefighters.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers and young people at Detroit’s Eastern Market on Saturday about the crisis facing the city.

“I think it is leading Detroit into another dark age,” said Manny, a Detroit resident. “How would you cut things we need? We need money. Cutting our schools, cutting our taxpayers, is not going to help anyone; it is going to make Detroit worse.”

Charvae added, “There will no one here to help us. They are cutting back firefighters and all of that. It is going to be felt.

“More cuts are not going to work. It will only make the city worse.”

Another Detroit resident said, “Look at General Motors, they got a bailout, why not Detroit? A lot of what is happening is not the city’s fault. Why can’t the state support the city? It would benefit everyone if Detroit succeeds. Letting it fail, I don’t know how it benefits anyone. Major cuts will cause major issues.”

A former city worker from Hamtramck, a working class enclave surrounded by the city of Detroit, told the WSWs, “We were the first city ever taken over by an

emergency financial manager. When we were taken over, he didn't have total control. He couldn't break the contracts. What he did was get rid of equipment that was not necessary, he consolidated departments. There were some layoffs.

"I think with the changes they are making in the financial manager law, it is giving the state too much power. It is unfortunate. If they have a financial manager, they have the power to strip all the contracts, to do whatever they want."

Nancy Watson lives in Detroit and commutes to the suburbs, where she works as a machine operator. She said, "We have no say on what they do. I don't think we need an emergency manager."

"When I was growing up in the city, kids could go to recreation centers. There were summer jobs. There were places to go. Now, there is no money. Everything is getting cut.

"I catch the bus. The bus service is ridiculous. On the weekends, they don't have the Oakland bus service or Tireman. So I have to walk to Woodward Avenue to go where I want. When they do come, they are late or there is something wrong.

"Then, to top it off, they said they couldn't have the Sister Strut on the river walk this year, which is an event to raise money to fight breast cancer. And this is my city?"

A young worker living in Detroit said, "I think the people at the top are the ones that should take cuts. The cuts they are talking about are going to cause a lot of problems. The city has already been cut to the bone."



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