

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN  
SOUTHERN DIVISION – DETROIT

FILED

2014 MAR 28 A 10: 50

In the matter of:

CITY OF DETROIT, MICHIGAN

U.S. BANKRUPTCY COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN - DETROIT  
Case No. 13-53846-swr  
Chapter 9  
Hon. STEVEN W. RHODES

Debtor \_\_\_\_\_/

**OBJECTION TO CITY OF DETROIT'S DISCLOSURE STATEMENT  
WITH RESPECT TO PLAN OF ADJUSTMENT [DOCKET 2709]**

FILED BY:

*Linda Marie Mulder*

hereby states his/her/their OBJECTION TO:

CITY OF DETROIT'S DISCLOSURE STATEMENT WITH RESPECT TO PLAN OF  
ADJUSTMENT [DOCKET 2709]

for the following reasons.

1. (1) we am/are interested in the Bankruptcy of the City of Detroit because *2 worked for the Detroit Public Library for 23 years as an excellent and dedicated employee who earned her full pension!*
2. (1) we object to the above filing because:  
*This idea that the "pot of money" in the pension fund should rebuild Detroit is every wrong. To pay for the city's mistakes on the backs of those the least able to afford it and the most vulnerable is morally and legally wrong.*
3. (1) I have/ have not attached additional sheets to explain and establish my position.

I hereby certify that the statements made herein are true and correct under penalty of perjury and contempt of Court under the laws of the United States of America.

Wherefore I/ we request the Court will deny the relief sought in said filing.

Name: *Linda Marie Mulder*Signature: *Linda Marie Mulder*Address: *211641 Kelmish Dr.**Northville, Mi 48167*Email: *mulder.linda643@gmail.com*Dated: *3/25/14*

21641 Kilrush Drive  
Northville, Michigan 48167-2838

March 24, 2014

I am writing as a retiree of the Detroit Public Library regarding Case 12-53846.

As far as I am aware, the Detroit Public Library always made the pension payments in a timely manner to the Detroit Pension Fund. Why then, are we included in the City of Detroit's failure to make timely payments to the Detroit Pension Fund for the city workers?

You have said that the Federal Bankruptcy laws replace the Michigan laws in regard to protecting our pensions. Does that mean you are "required" to adjust our pensions just because you can? Isn't it your decision whether or not to have them adjusted as the Chief Justice in this case?

Also, why would it seem fair or honest to anyone that the modest pensions of retirees from the City of Detroit pension fund, support updating the city services? I think if you asked the residents of Detroit (many of whom do receive City of Detroit pensions) if they wanted retirees to support the city for the past financial outrages, they would not agree to that. Why is everything that comes out of the Emergency Manager's mouth and the spokesperson's mouth equating improving city services by cutting the pensions of retirees? This is nothing more than a smoke screen by elected and appointed officials to make it seem like this is the "right" thing to do.

Plus, taking money from pensions also reduces the buying power of those who can least afford it, making it probable they will need Federal and State assistance for basic needs in the future. How does this help our City and our economy? There is no reason for anyone to move to Detroit or Michigan when the elected and appointed officials cannot be trusted to protect present and former employees.

Pensions are somewhat different in that we didn't loan the City money for a financial return. Financial institutions did that in order to take the risk of making money then and in the future. Pensioners did not do that...we worked for many years with the idea that in the end we would be able to collect our pension. We were not trying to "make money". We did invest many hours working for the City (in my case, the Library) often working under what we might call "combat conditions". In the meantime, City Officials went about serving themselves at the expense of the City Residents and City Employees. Now, you want us, the innocent, to pay for the excesses of the guilty!

I understand changing the health care and pension rules for present and future employees. The old plans can be stopped at a certain date (with accrued benefits left in place) and new plans put in place on a certain date without anyone losing out. It is apparent that the City cannot support the costs of previous pensions and health

care offerings. Changing them for already retired persons who are the most vulnerable is really a significant moral question. We have had much taken away in health care already. Anyone not eligible for Medicare is going to struggle now with paying for health care – the very health care that was also one of the conditions of employment for the City.

There is also the issue of the dramatic reduction in state revenue sharing. The State government now has a surplus at the expense of local municipalities. There has been no mention of restoring revenue sharing to the local municipalities.

Another rather strange action was linking the DIA to Detroit Retiree Pensions. Why was this thought to be a good idea and who is really benefitting from this?

Another factor that no one seems to mention is that the State Retirement Fund, known as MERS, tried to take over the Detroit Pension Funds several years ago, as MERS needed the money from the Detroit Fund to be fully funded. It appears that this is another way for MERS to get control of the Detroit Pension Fund.

I am sure you are fully aware that your decisions in this huge bankruptcy case are going to determine the future for many people who will lose out because they are weak and vulnerable.

The last item I would like to address is why the RUSH RUSH RUSH? You want the retirees to sign away their pensions before everything has gone through the court system. This feels like a scam when someone tells you that you have to sign right now to get the discount. Besides terrifying retirees with the pension cuts that were announced, do you need to rush them to perhaps make bad decisions?

Thank you.  
Linda M. Mulder

# The Real Story Behind the Detroit Pension Fight and What it Means to America's Future

<http://www.rooseveltinstitute.org/author/robert-johnson>

When the city of Detroit filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy in July 2013, America sucked in a collective gasp. This was the largest municipal bankruptcy filing in U.S. history by the amount of debt (\$18 to \$20 billion), and Detroit was the largest city ever to officially go bust.

A few months before the bankruptcy, the state of Michigan appointed an emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, to sort things out in Motor City. Orr was given extraordinary powers to rewrite contracts and liquidate some of the city's most valuable assets. The burning question: Who would be responsible for the enormous debt? Soon enough it became clear that the folks who would be asked to take the hit were not those who created the problems. Just as in so many other parts of the world in the wake of the 2007-08 financial meltdown, innocent people who did nothing but get up every day and go to work would be asked to pay the bill.

Recently, Orr blasted retirees for resisting his plan to drastically cut their pensions -- 26 percent for general retirees and 6 percent for police and fire, and even more, 34 percent and 10 percent, respectively, if they do not agree quickly.

The fight is on. Other cities and states are paying close attention to what goes down in Detroit. But there's something much bigger than bankruptcy going on, and it concerns the future of American society. The answer to the question of who we defend and who we punish when the going gets tough is being written into our future.

If you think of Detroit as far away and unrelated to life in your hometown, think again. The next victim could be your town, your community, your retirement.

## We Are All Detroit

~~Robert Johnson~~ of the children in Detroit live in poverty. Property crime is twice the American average, violent crime three times greater. The statistics are shocking, but they only whisper the misery endured by the people who call this city -- once among America's crown jewels, and believe it or not, known as the "City of Champions" -- their home.

Robert Johnson, executive director of the Institute of New Economic Thinking, is an economist who has worked closely with the likes of Joseph Stiglitz and has served in Washington as chief economist of the U.S. Senate Banking Committee under William Proxmire.

Johnson, who was my colleague when I served as Media Fellow at the Roosevelt Institute from 2009-2011, is an economist who believes that his work is about more than abstract mathematical models. It's about human experience -- the vivid hopes and challenges of ordinary people. When I asked Johnson how he came to think that way, a wistful smile crosses his lips: "I grew up in Detroit."

I sat down with Johnson in his New York City home, where his voice thickened with sorrow as he described the pain of looking on as the thriving city of his boyhood sank into an apocalyptic wasteland of crumbling buildings and bewildered people who mostly played by the rules but saw their lives "compressed and crushed."

He recalled for me the Detroit of the 1960s, a great engine of the American economy and the cradle of many of the country's most illustrious political figures, like Representative John Dingell (whose district started out in Detroit and gradually moved to the western suburbs through redistricting). It was also a cauldron in which the great currents of America's deepest conflict swirled: the deadly race riots of 1967, the labor wrangling of the UAW and the Teamsters, the turmoil of the Vietnam War, and the drugs that flooded the city in the wake of deindustrialization.

Johnson reflects upon the work of his friend, John A. Powell of Berkeley, a scholar of American culture who explores how we perceive some people and communities as "others." Many things can be the basis of otherness, like race, or economic status, or gender. When we decide something is other, we absolve ourselves from having to care about it. Detroit, as Johnson explains, has become America's urban other. As a city is liquidated for the creditors, the victims are blamed, the people become traumatized, and the trust in American institutions breaks down. Johnson's work has shown that far from being a necessity, the decision to cut the pensions of teachers and other public workers is a choice -- one that will hurt both them and future generations. As he talks about Detroit, Johnson eschews the antiseptic terms common among economists, pouring out visceral words like "pain," "crushing" and "gut-wrenching" to describe what's at stake for all of us.

"Detroit is the canary in the coal mine of America," Johnson says. "It's becoming more and more evident that you can't count on social institutions, or your fellow citizens, or your money managers, or your healthcare system." Detroit is not an isolated case, he cautions, but will serve as a precedent for how the country works in the future. When the weak and vulnerable are asked to pay for our sins, we will all pay in the end.

## The Real Pension Story

At a recent conference on pensions convened by the Roosevelt Institute, Johnson, along with Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, political scientist Thomas Ferguson, economists Lisa Cook, Dean Baker, and others gathered to explore the meaning of a decision called Entrenchment, which is alluring to economists and the country's political underbelly.

To understand this story, first you have to understand the truth of what is happening with pensions across America. Media accounts, often influenced by the campaigns of well-funded organizations and individuals like billionaire anti-pension activist John Arnold, have too often promoted the false image of a widespread crisis in which overpaid public workers have been promised unaffordable and bloated pensions. That's far from reality, Johnson's work shows. In a new paper that will serve as an antidote to a distorted national narrative, he makes several facts clear:

**1. Pension underfunding is not widespread.** Despite a devastating Wall Street-driven financial crisis which decimated sales, property and state income tax receipts and which led to big cuts in federal aid, many American cities and states have managed to keep their pensions reasonably healthy. In fact, gross underfunding is concentrated in certain states, such as Illinois and Kentucky, and in cities like Chicago. These areas seem to have a few things in common, such as poor governance and unreliable public officials who have mishandled funding. Outright corruption is also common. Detroit's government would certainly win no prizes for responsible governance, and its pension funds' accounting practices were less than perfect, but as Johnson reports, as of 2012, the "funding ratios" (actuarial assets divided actuarial liabilities) of the city's two big pensions funds stood at 99.9% and 87.1 respectively. That's hardly the emergency many media accounts portray.

**2. State and local employees are not overcompensated.** Johnson explains that the widespread perception that public workers are overpaid is highly exaggerated. Citing studies by economist Alicia Munnell and others, his paper shows that at the lower levels, overall rates of pay vary little between workers in the public and private sectors. At the higher levels, public workers actually make *less* than their public sector counterparts. Cases of overcompensation exist, but they are not the norm and don't significantly contribute to underfunding problems. Overcompensation clearly did not cause the pension crisis in places like Detroit, where levels of staffing and pay per employee are well under large Midwestern cities like Cleveland and St. Louis.

Instead, Detroit's finances were done in by three developments that have zero connection with city employees. First, in 1998, a Republican governor pressured the city to cut income taxes in exchange for \$333.9 million annually in increased state revenue sharing for nine years. In 2002, after Detroit had cut its tax rates, the state partially reneged, over time opening a huge cumulative hole in the city's budget. In 2010 Detroit lost \$24 million more a year when its share of the state's sales tax revenue fell as a result of the 2010 Census. In fiscal year 2012, the state administered a final blow: the state legislature chopped an additional \$43 million in revenue sharing to the city. As Johnson summarizes, "Between 2010 and 2013 over 47.8% of the total decline in city revenue was a result of the decline in state transfers to the city of Detroit. When Detroit went over a cliff into bankruptcy the state could rightly be accused of providing a major shove."

**3. Underfunding is linked to unrealistic expectations of returns.** One of the key reasons pension problems have developed has to do with how future returns on funds are assessed. Accounting tricks can get you the results you want, and political pressures often cause pension stewards to play around with the numbers. In technical terms, it matters whether you use something called a high discount rate or a low discount rate to determine returns.

As Joseph Stiglitz has pointed out, if you decide to care about something in the future, you make plans assuming that returns will be low, and you use a low discount rate. But if you decide you don't care about something, you use a high discount rate, which allows you to project high future returns and lets you off the hook for investing in the fund right now. Pension stewards have often based their projections on periods of unusually high stock market returns, and have therefore avoided making the payments necessary to keep funds healthy.

**4. Chasing big yield leads to big problems.** Where pensions are in trouble, stewards often try the economic equivalent of a Hail Mary pass: They pour large sums into alternative investments in risky assets. Investments of this sort -- handled by hedge funds, venture capital, and private equity -- have risen sharply since the 1980s. They now constitute 20 percent of public pension fund allocations, despite the fact that fees are high and returns are often subpar -- even disastrous in 2008 and after. The huge fees tempt the firms pushing these investments to create all kinds of questionable incentives for pension stewards. Pension funds rely heavily on a vast corps of advisers, whose advice has been shown in academic studies to add no value at all. Considering, as Dean Baker and Thomas Ferguson commented, that many city and state pensioners do not receive Social Security, it is scandalous that pension managers chase high yields through high-risk assets as opposed to prudent investment in index funds, which have low fees or no fees at all.

Not surprisingly, another disastrous blow to Detroit's finances came with a ridiculous derivatives deal connected with a special financing offer. As Johnson explains,

"The Detroit facts are really quite simple. The revenue losses have resulted from declines in real estate values, loss of income and loss of sales volume attributable to the crisis emanating from Wall Street after 2008. A drastic cut in state revenue sharing from the state of Michigan to Detroit in 2012 occurred on the back of previous cutbacks from the state to the city over nine years. The coup de grace was the derivatives transaction that led to diminished 'other revenues' from the Detroit Water and Sewage Department and a swaps termination penalty that led to marked increases in cash flow demands on the city of Detroit."

**5. Big money politics and corruption are major culprits.** As Thomas Ferguson has noted, pension underfunding and corruption go hand in hand: areas which have seen pension crises tend to have high rates of corruption, as measured by such indicators as the number of public officials who wind up in prison. Pay-to-play schemes are rampant, and reports of bribery, such as those revealed in Detroit, are common. Even in the absence of corruption, big money politics has a major influence over how pensions are managed and allocated -- a major reason why campaign finance reform is urgent. As Ferguson observes, local and state politicians are relying more and more on Wall Street and other anti-pension business interests.

**6. Cutting pensions is a choice, not a necessity.** As Johnson and others have noted, there seems to be a discrepancy in how the sanctity of contracts is viewed in America. When it comes to the bonuses of AIG executives after the financial crisis, we were told by experts and pundits that contracts must not be broken, and that taxpayers should foot the bill to avoid breaking this fundamental trust. But in Detroit or Chicago, we are told that the contracts of pensioners are not really worth the paper they're written on. The difference? AIG executives are powerful and well-connected. Pensioners are not.

There are resources to meet pension obligations, if only politicians could make decisions in the interests of ordinary people, rather than the 1 percent who do not wish to see their taxes raised. Johnson further notes that where pension shortfalls exist, they are far smaller than giveaways to corporations.

**7. Decisions made now have far-reaching implications.** Johnson finds that among the key themes in the pension discussion are what our choices say about the dysfunction in America politics and the kind of society we are creating for the future.

High-quality workers are attracted to decent-paying jobs and promises they can rely upon. When you cut the pensions of teachers, for example, you can't attract the highly educated workers needed to fill these jobs, and the quality of education suffers. This means that it's not just public workers who suffer when their pensions are cut, but the children who rely on schools and the businesses that rely on a well-maintained, thriving city. It is also likely, Johnson warns, that overall compensation in the private sector will be driven down, and inequality exacerbated if public pensions are chopped. All of these factors, he points out, only serve to increase the instability of the overall economy and society.

Stiglitz added an important consideration: that once any major pension system is revised shotgun-style, employees everywhere will doubt the value of their contracts and over time leave in droves. How does that bode for America's future?

Detroit is a city being looted and stripped bare. If we decide that those who are weak and vulnerable will be sacrificed to protect the wealthy and the powerful, then no one is safe. When promises are made, but then broken, a "train wreck is set up," as Johnson puts it, and emergency manager Kevyn Orr appears to have his foot on the gas.

Johnson ends his pension study with a lyric from the great jazz artist Gil Scott-Heron, who wrote a haunting song about a partial nuclear meltdown that occurred in Detroit in 1966:

"That when it comes to people's safety

Money wins out every time.

And we almost lost Detroit this time, this time..."

If we don't do the right thing in Detroit, Johnson warns, we might just lose America this time.



# THE GREAT REVENUE **SHARING** HEIST

By Anthony Minghine

**T**here have been a lot of high profile robberies over the years. The Lufthansa robbery, D.B. Cooper highjacking, the Antwerp Diamond Caper...but these crimes look amateurish compared to the state of Michigan's Great Revenue Sharing Heist. The state has managed to pinch over \$6 billion in revenue sharing from local government over the last several years. Those numbers would even get Bernie Madoff's attention.

Michigan's broken municipal financing model is almost a cliché.

Talking about budget numbers and deficits in the *billions* of dollars can cause us to lose perspective. The fact is, there are a record number of local governments that find themselves in the midst of a financial crisis. Is it the result of mismanagement, neglect, or incompetence? Or is it the result of a dramatic disinvestment by the state in local government? I suggest the latter.

In my view, there are three major factors that have led communities to the financial brink: post retirement costs; a steep decline in property values; and

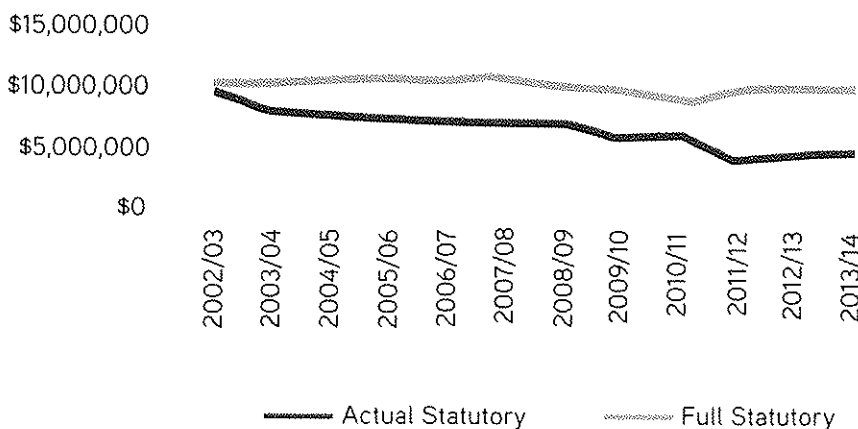
a dramatic reduction in state revenue sharing. The third factor will be the focus of this article.

Post retirement costs are a huge issue that locals are grappling with. Change here is difficult at best; local governments are hamstrung with contracts and laws that make transformation slow. The property tax declines local governments have experienced could not have been anticipated to the degree they occurred, and are certainly out of the control of anyone in this state. Statutory revenue sharing, on the other hand, has been unilaterally taken by the state to solve its budget issues. It's a fact. Revenue sharing is paid from sales tax revenues, which have been a remarkably stable source of income, and have in recent years experienced significant growth.

## Breaking Down the Numbers

Hopefully you'll stick with me, as I'm about to drop the "b" word. From 2003-2013, sales tax revenues went from \$6.6 billion to \$7.72 billion. Over that same period, statutory revenue sharing declined from over \$900 million annually to around \$250 million. The state is now in an enviable position—revenues that exceeded expectations. It is posting

**CITY OF PONTIAC**  
Annual Revenue Sharing Loss



## PROJECTED REVENUE TAKEN 2003-2014

|                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| Allen Park       | \$8,440,088   |
| Alpena           | \$4,371,700   |
| Dearborn         | \$31,320,463  |
| Detroit          | \$732,235,683 |
| Farmington Hills | \$20,488,283  |
| Ferndale         | \$9,772,967   |
| Flint            | \$54,868,096  |
| Grand Rapids     | \$72,854,201  |
| Hamtramck        | \$13,301,632  |
| Lincoln Park     | \$17,147,092  |
| Marquette        | \$6,907,445   |
| Melvindale       | \$5,865,221   |
| Pontiac          | \$40,533,681  |
| Saginaw          | \$30,329,283  |
| Southfield       | \$21,904,790  |
| Traverse City    | \$4,307,187   |
| Warren           | \$45,961,823  |

large surpluses but has failed to take steps to restore local funding.

In fact, the state is trumpeting its sound fiscal management and admonishing local governments for not being as efficient. What the state fails to mention is that it balanced its own budget on the backs of local communities. This would be like me taking your money to pay my bills, and then telling you that you need to be more responsible with your household budget. In fairness, the state did experience revenue declines out of its control, much like locals experienced with property tax declines. It is different, though, in one important way—local communities couldn't take money from others and push those tough decisions down to someone else.

What is most shocking is the difference those revenue sharing dollars would have made at the local level. As I stated at the onset of this article, we now have a record number of communities facing financial emergencies. It's easy to blame local

leaders, but you must consider all the facts. In most cases, communities that currently face large deficits would in contrast have general fund surpluses.

### Let's Get Specific: Four Cities' Cuts

So what does it mean to specific communities? For Allen Park, an \$857,000 deficit in 2012 becomes a surplus of over \$5 million and would grow to a projected surplus of \$7.3 million by 2014. Hamtramck's deficit of \$580,000 would have been a surplus of \$8.7 million. Flint will have lost \$54.9 million dollars by the end of 2014. The deficit in its 2012 financial statements is \$19.2 million. Flint could eliminate the deficit and pay off all \$30 million of bonded indebtedness and still have over \$5 million in surplus. In Detroit, a city facing the largest municipal bankruptcy in history, the state took over \$700 million to balance the state's books.

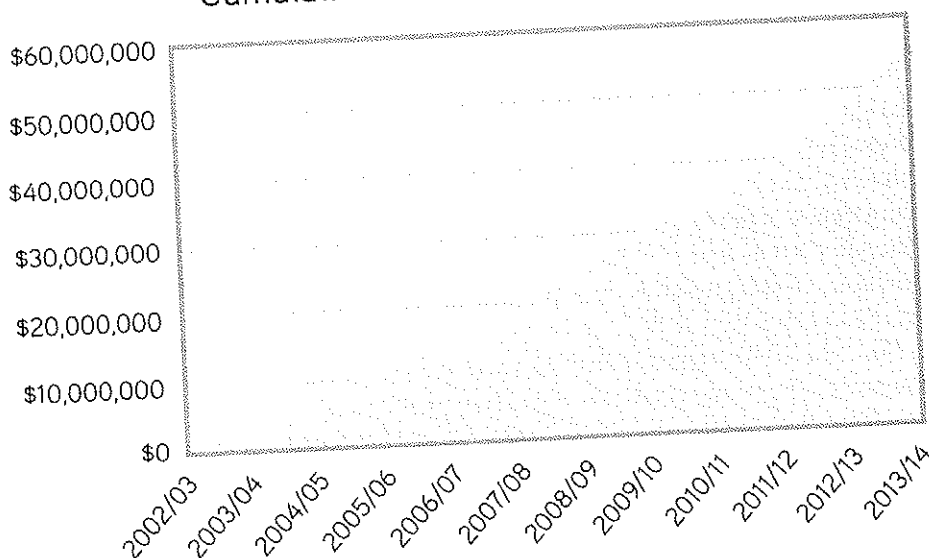
This data begs the question: did municipalities ignore their duty to manage or did someone else change the rules of the game and then throw a penalty flag at them? I see yellow flags all over the playing field. Post-retirement benefits are a huge expense and burden to local government, but we must not ignore the reality—the promises were made with a different expectation from the state as it relates to sharing sales

tax revenue with local government. It's a fact that the state has broken that promise. State leaders excused themselves from making tough choices, instead using local money to pay their bills. In the process, they have created most, if not all, of the financial emergencies at the local level.

The numbers don't lie. Revenue sharing is the only factor that anyone has had direct control over during these difficult financial times. It is time for the state to shift gears and start investing in local government again. Hardships at the local level weren't created by a lack of cooperation or collaboration. I would humbly submit that local governments invented the concept and the state is very late to the table. Local government officials have done, and will continue to do, their part to be prudent managers, but the goal cannot be to hang on and survive. Our goal must be to ensure that our cities are vibrant places that people will choose to live in, and that can only happen if the state fulfills its promise and responsibility to invest where the rubber meets the road, and that is at the local level. (m)

Anthony Minghine is the associate director of the League. You may reach him at 734-669-6360 or [aminghine@mml.org](mailto:aminghine@mml.org).

## CITY OF FLINT Cumulative Revenue Sharing Losses





# All Out April 1 At Federal Courthouse – 10 AM

## Protest Against 34% Pension Theft, Wage/Benefit Cuts, Give-away of City Assets

Calling on all City of Detroit retirees, current City workers, residents and other concerned people for a mass protest outside the Federal Courthouse in Detroit (231 W. Lafayette St.). Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr has a “Plan of Adjustment” that will loot the pension funds to pay off the bankers. 90% of the bank debt owed by City of Detroit will be paid 100%. Only a small percentage of lenders will take a hit. Meanwhile Orr wants to give \$85 Million to Bank of America and UBS as a reward for illegal bond swaps—but they stole over \$300 Million from us through these swaps over the past 6 years.

Fight back or starve! That is the choice for over 20,000 retirees. Health care has been eliminated for those under 65. Now they want to take 34% of the little retirees get after decades of loyal service. The plan of adjustment assures that no banker will miss a meal, but for retirees it's a death sentence.

There is plenty of money. Gov. Snyder is withholding hundreds of millions of revenue sharing owed Detroit. Orr could sue BofA, UBS and other big banks to recover the \$300 Million they stole in the pension swaps deal and over \$500 Million in ill-gotten gains via the Water Department bond swap. The banks who destroyed our cities with racist predatory loans have been fined \$50 Billion by the federal

government (Chase Bank paid \$13 Billion alone!). Detroit should get some of that huge sum as restitution for destroying our neighborhoods.

The City will pay ZERO into the pension fund for the next 10 years, depending entirely on charitable contributions which are not guaranteed. Cost of living increases are to be eliminated. Orr wants to make retirees pay back 34% of what they've already collected since June 2013 and take back some annuity money from retirees going back to 1999!

Only a MASS MOVEMENT will stop this terrorist conspiracy. Civil and worker rights were affirmed by the courts only after the mass struggle forced them. Lawyers in the courts need the support of thousands in the streets to drive home the point – this is UNACCEPTABLE.

Issued by: Moratorium NOW! Coalition ([Moratorium-Mi.org](http://Moratorium-Mi.org)); Stop Theft of Our Pensions Committee 313-680-5508