

Protests continue over Detroit library closures

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Members of the Fenmore Block Association and other Detroit residents picketed the main branch of the Detroit Public Library Tuesday afternoon to oppose the threatened closure of the Jessie Chase branch and five other local libraries in the city. The protest followed a picket last week that mobilized dozens of local residents outside the Chase branch in northwest Detroit.

The Tuesday protest won the support of library users and passing motorists on Woodward Avenue, who honked their horns to display solidarity with the picketers. Scores of passersby stopped to sign a petition opposing the library closures. Over 300 signatures had been gathered since the block club began collecting them last Thursday. Supporters of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs also participated in the picket, distributing a leaflet titled “Oppose all Library Cuts.”

Carolyn Dubose, a resident of the neighborhood near the Chase branch was one of those walking the picket. She told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the claim by library commissioners that the Chase branch was not being used was false. “The excuse that they are using to close the library is suspect. Children need to get on the computer. People need to get on the computer to check on their unemployment. That library is the heart of that little community there. We need our libraries.”

Library administrators are proposing the closure of six Detroit branch libraries to offset declining revenues. They claim that after laying off 20 percent of its workforce in March, the system no longer has the manpower needed to staff all 23 libraries in the city. The Library Commission is set to meet September 20 to consider the closures. In addition to the Chase branch, the libraries set to close are Chandler Park, Lincoln, Mark Twain Annex, Monteith and Richard.

The proposed closure of a half dozen branch libraries is in line with the plans of the administration of Democratic Mayor David Bing to shut down whole sections of the city, cutting off essential services and driving residents out. In the case of the Chase branch, residents, many of whom do not have cars, would be forced to travel several miles to get to the nearest library.

The Fenmore Block Association has been active in the campaign against the closure of the Chase branch, located on Seven Mile Road in northwest Detroit. It plans to organize a mass turnout Wednesday afternoon at a meeting at the Chase branch, where library commission members are scheduled to attend.

Gertrude Cherry, a member of the Fenmore Block Association said, “I have been there 40 years. And the library has been there. It is not just a building sitting there. It is well used, it is well maintained. The children are using it. People from other areas are using it. It is a good library. It serves the people. It is an asset.

“I am not one to usually do this. But, we need our library. I will stand with this sign for as long as it takes.”

Clarence Lovette, another member of the Fenmore Block Association and a retired Ford worker, said, “We think it shouldn’t be closed. We are doing this for the kids. We know the kids really need this. We have a lot of kids who don’t have computers. A lot of them need to do their homework. That is where they have to go.

“I was out this morning passing out pamphlets in the neighborhood. People were really concerned. One lady said she had 3 or 4 kids and didn’t have a computer in her house.

“The next closest library is in Redford or Livonia. A lot of people don’t have cars. Our library does not need

repairs I don't see why it should close.

“Detroit needs these libraries. They don't want to put money into the cities, especially Detroit, but that is where money should go.”

A staff member from the Main Branch of the Detroit Public Library came out to give encouragement to the protestors, explaining that many library workers are demoralized, frustrated and angry at their working conditions. The library worker said staff is under constant pressure because the libraries are constantly crowded and do not have the manpower to handle the workload. “If someone calls in sick the entire department has to close down because they do not have the staff to do the work. No one likes it. We would be out here with you if we could. We wish you the best of luck in your fight.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several library users who stopped to show their support for the protest. Jasmine, a student at Wayne County Community College, “Unemployment is up. They are cutting welfare. It is bad for everyone.

“It's crazy. They are taking away things that people need. They are spending money to put people lives in jeopardy (in the military) and taking away the resources that are going to help the community,”

Another Detroit resident added, as he stopped to sign the petition, “No library should be closed. They should be automatically funded, period. They are trying to destroy every form of education.”

Thielas Perry, a retired auditor said, “I have lived in the city for 50 years. We need to oppose this. The people are the city. They have the wrong priorities. That's why they cut things like bus service first. The things that affect the people. How can you cut public services?

“Something is wrong when you have an emergency financial manager for the schools for 4 years and you are paying him a half million and come out owing more than when he first came in.”

Chris, a state certified peer support specialist, stopped to support the protest. He told the WSWs, “I work near Eastern Market and we send folks to the library every day. They would come to the library to do studying. They read books online as well. They have a lot of programs and stuff going on, it's not just books.”

A passerby, John from Grosse Pointe, said, “Our generation is old enough to remember libraries in every neighborhood. I always took them for granted.

“I'm from the suburbs basically. When the library in Romulus closed temporarily, I just couldn't imagine that something like that could happen. You can't function as a democracy without these institutions. That's why its so important that they be preserved.”



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