

Northwest Detroit residents continue to fight library closure

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Local residents angrily picketed in cold weather and rain September 29 outside Chase library, one of six local branches slated for closure by the Detroit Library Commission. The other libraries scheduled to close are Chandler Park, Lincoln, Mark Twain Annex, Monteith and Richard.

Since making the announcement that Chase library would close, residents in the Northwest area of Detroit have gathered hundreds of signatures on petitions, held numerous protests and, on September 14, spoke before the Detroit Library Commission. To date, no final decision has been announced on the closures.

Chase library and all the local libraries serve not only as a location to check out books; they are an integral part of the neighborhood. They provide meeting facilities for local neighborhood organizations, free tutoring for those in need, and computer classes. Unemployed workers use the library to search for jobs and students utilize a variety of resources.

The actions organized through the efforts of Peggy Noble from the Fenmore Block Association have won widespread support in the community. Workers who live in this area have seen industries decimated and schools, recreation centers and fire stations closed. They are taking a stand against any further attacks on the social infrastructure.

The Socialist Equality Party and the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs have supported these actions and joined with residents involved in the picketing last Thursday. Many of those participating spoke out on why they are involved

Jimmiaya Dixon, a 17-year-old student, explained, “I’m a senior in high school and I need to come here to get books to research for essays. I just love my English teacher, not only because she’s such a good teacher, but also because she really cares. I am doing research

on protests for her class. I’ve been reading a lot about the civil rights movement and how those people got together.

“I think it is important to study history because you don’t always have the right idea about what was going on. For example I was found out that there were many white people who participated in the Civil Rights movement and supported it. I am really upset that they are cutting the very things that we got from the Civil Rights protests.

“Look at the Detroit public schools. We don’t have the kind of things that they have at other schools. Our schools are not as nice and we suffer for it. I go to Crockett. I used to go to the vocational high school nearby but they shut that down. So in order to finish my vocational program I had to go to a school on the East side. Having this library near my home is important to me because I love to read and I read so many books all the time.

“They claimed that people don’t utilize the libraries enough to keep them open. I do not think that is true at all. I come to this library at least three times every month to get books and I see all kinds of people. There are young, old, mothers, kids in school. I am glad to see that people have come out to protest today. You don’t see this too much anymore, but I think the young people need to be a part of it.”

Brooklyn Taylor is in a two-year program in surgical technology at Wayne County Community College. She said, “I think it is bad that they are always trying to stop things in the urban areas. We really need this library. I do not have a computer at home and I use libraries all over the city in order to study. This is a good library and I enjoy using it and it is just as nice as the other ones they have, so I do not think they should close it down.

“I just saw this movie called *Sicko*. It was a struggle against the library closures. She told the Moore movie. People in this country cannot even go to the doctor because they do not have health insurance. They showed that in places like France everybody has health care coverage and people don’t die because they can’t get medical care. Here they just don’t care what happens to you.”

Brooklyn commented on the impending cutoff of women receiving welfare cash benefits. “I know some women who are going to be cut off on Saturday. One woman has eight children. It is absurd to think that she can find a job that’s going to cover daycare for that many kids. What will she do? Where will she go? I know another woman who has a young baby at home who may be affected. Getting a job in Detroit is extremely difficult.

Lisa Smith said, “I am a social worker and I am applying for disability. I worked at Detroit Public Schools as a school nurse. I was also a caseworker at a mental health center. I got sick in January. Since then I have been going back and forth doing paperwork.

“I don’t have a computer at home so I come here to do computer work. It is very convenient for me. This is really important for me. If they close this library it will cause a lot of anxiety. I come here at least three days a week because of the computers.

“It is a great place for both children and adults. It is a quiet place you can come to. It is an important resource for the community. Many people can’t afford to travel to other places.

“We are responsible for the children in our community. If we don’t invest in our children, what is going to happen? They are our foundation. We have to fight this.

Mylick Jones, a student at Henry Ford High School in Detroit, said, “This is the only place we have to go after school. It is ridiculous to close it. It is the only thing that us kids have in the neighborhood. To me, this is my world.

“There is no place else to go to do our homework. With all the schools closing down we have to have our library.”

His friend Semaj Cowan, also a student at Henry Ford, added, “There is nothing to replace this. Nowhere else to go.”

Etta Jones, a member of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs, came to show her support for the

was a struggle against the library closures. She told the WSWS, “I am concerned about what this library means to the community. A lot of people don’t have the money to have a computer at home. This library is stable. It is a quiet place for children to come to. Some of the homes children come from are chaotic.

“It is making a terrible statement when you close something so integral to the community. It is devastating. It is obscene that a library is closing in a community that needs it.”



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