

“Not one child should go without water”

Detroit residents denounce water shutoffs

Our reporters
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The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) said Wednesday that it shut off water to 7,210 households last month, on top of 7,556 shutoffs in April and May. Approximately 150,000 households have received notices that they are at risk for shutoff. The past due amount owed by 79,000 customers, according to the DWSD, totals \$41 million with the average bill being \$529.

Last month, a United Nations agency issued a report denouncing the city's water shutoffs, stating, “Disconnection of water services because of failure to pay due to lack of means constitutes a violation of the human right to water and other international human rights.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with city residents at the DWSD payment center on Grand Avenue on the city's west side. Many people said that their water was shut off without any warning, that they were charged excessively because of bureaucratic mistakes and that the money they usually reserve for groceries, gas, and other essentials will now be used to pay their water bills.

Typical were the comments of La Verne Johnson, retiree and health-care worker, who said, “It's a shame we have to be without water, because we're all poor.”

Carmelo Gonzalez came with friends and family to pay their bill. “My friend's water was shut off because he owes \$150. He has to pay it with what little work he gets from construction. Some days he works, sometimes not. The economy is really bad right now and they can't make payments. There is only one income for a family. Obama made too many promises he never kept.”

Silvia Popovici is an immigrant from Romania who has lived in America for over twenty years. She works at Meijer supermarket and takes care of family. “What

we need is more time. I wasn't very late, my payments were on time. I dropped off a check, but it's a reinstatement check. They said they couldn't find the check so I ended up paying double and it's still off! At least give people a notice.

“There is a blue line painted on my house, and it's embarrassing,” She said, referring to the fact that the water department marks houses for disconnection with a line of blue chalk on the sidewalk. “Once I mailed a money order that was never accredited toward my account worth \$350. Things like this never happened in America, until now.”

Alan, a father of two girls aged 18 and 17, said, “The rates are real high, it used to be a bill every three months, now it's every month. I'm on disability and it's hard. I have to borrow from Peter to pay Paul.” When asked about the city's bankruptcy he replied, “It's because of greed, not one child should go without water. What more do they want?”

Laurie Wade told the WSWS her family pays \$116 every two months. “It's crazy; if anything water should be free. I noticed the police updated their cars to the newest Chargers, but they're shutting off people's water.”

Roger, a retired Detroit city worker living on a fixed income, also said his water rates have increased. “I was paying for my sister, and it seems the rates have been going up.” He concluded, “They're going to take money from me. That's a trip. It's all for the politicians, for the rich man, the corporations.”

Le Meca, a disabled worker, said three quarters of her \$1000-per-month income will now go just to paying utilities. “For a single person it used to be \$40 to \$50, now it's \$80 to \$90. It used to be a bill every three months. I'm on disability and I can't afford it. I just got lights and gas turned back on.”

Many people like Diee said they felt they were unfairly targeted by DWSD. “They cut off my water once without even giving me notice then they charge me for cutting it off and again for turning back on. My bill increased by \$20 a month. I feel attacked!”

Tamika is an unemployed mother with three children. “I owe \$4,000 for 3 months. This bill is taking money out of everything. It’s crazy, water is a right.”

Hartwell, a disabled worker, said, “I don’t think it’s right for anybody to get their water cut off. They’ve got no compassion. My bill is \$166 and I’m in debt already. I haven’t made my payment this month. I’ve got shut off by DTE and I have to juggle payments every month.”

Laurie Allen has 4 children. “My bill used to be \$143 a month, then all of a sudden I owe \$1,800 because of a leak they discovered. I asked for a hearing and they wouldn’t give me one.”



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