

SEP campaign against Detroit water shutoffs evokes warm response from Chrysler workers

Our reporters
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A Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaign team fighting to mobilize opposition to Detroit's plans to shut off water to thousands of residents found a warm response Thursday from workers at Chrysler's Warren Truck assembly plant.

The city administration is planning to shut off water to up to 150,000 families who are behind on their payments, at a rate of 3,000 per week. The campaign team included members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Wayne State University and Eastern Michigan University, and was led by former SEP presidential candidate Jerry White.

Hundreds of workers took copies of the SEP's auto worker newsletter during the plant's shift change. Drivers on the street outside the plant honked in support of the team's banners, which read, "water is a social right," and stopped to take copies of the newsletter. Workers said they were glad to see a fight against the water shutoffs.

The starting pay for so-called "second-tier" jobs at the plant pay around \$16 per hour, half the starting pay a generation ago. Given the sweeping reduction in auto workers' wages, it is hardly surprising that some of the workers met by the campaign team had their water shut off.

"Can you believe that now they are taking water away from the people?" said Laura, a worker with 29 years at Chrysler. When campaigners explained that 50 cents on every dollar in water bill payments went to pay off debt to the banks, Laura interjected, "Everything goes to the banks."

Referring to the 2009 GM and Chrysler bankruptcy, she added, "When we were in bankruptcy, the workers got nothing; there shouldn't be a two-tier wage system. They are turning back the clock on everything."

"This is unfair," said a young second-tier worker,

"people have infants and grandparents who need water for humidifiers. There should be a fund set up so that no one goes without water and other necessities."

A second-tier auto worker, added, "They treat people like animals in Detroit. In here (the factory) it's the same; you're like a robot."

Some workers were swayed by the massive media campaign to paint the victims of water shutoffs as lazy and irresponsible. "I pay my bills, why can't they?" asked an older, first-tier autoworker. One of the SEP's campaigners responded by saying that the money being squeezed from the elderly and unemployed in Detroit was not going to cover the operating expenses of the water department but to pay off the big banks. "These are the same banks that are demanding pension cuts, the selloff of art work, forcing young auto workers to accept poverty wages."

An older worker added, "Cutting off water is a travesty. I've always said that there should be no charge for water and other things like food and shelter. They say we can't afford to provide those things to everyone but that's a lie to protect the rich and powerful." Pointing to the cuts in city worker pensions, he added, "People have worked all their lives for that and it's being taken away. There should be a fight against this."

When a campaigner pointed out that such a struggle had to be organized independently of and in opposition to the unions, who are aligned with the corporations and the government, he added, "The UAW sucks. They want to raise our dues for a strike fund that we will never use."

"It's ridiculous that people are forced to live without water," said Rachael, a worker with 15 years at Chrysler. "I heard on the news that Ford Field and the Joe Louis hockey arena owe tens of thousands of

dollars, but they certainly aren't having their water turned off.”

“We have a capitalist society and its divided into two classes: the rich and the poor. The younger generation has it even worse with the two-tier wages. You can't live on \$15 an hour. Unfortunately the new hires have never seen it any other way. Now the company wants to get rid of the first-tier workers and have everybody at the lower wage.

“I can't stand Obama. Everything they say is a lie and I am fed up. The Democrats and Republicans put up a diversion and act like they are fighting each other but in reality they're both fighting against us.”



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