SEP campaigns against water shutoffs in Detroit

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The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) has disconnected water to more than 14,000 homes in the city, at a rate of 3,000 people per week. Nearly 150,000 customers have been notified about possible water shutoffs, affecting nearly half the households in the city.

The Socialist Equality Party and the Detroit Workers Committee will be holding a rally this Thursday at the Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant to appeal to workers to oppose the shutoffs and fight plans to privatize the municipally owned department and eliminate 80 percent of the workforce.

Members of the SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality campaigned to build support for the rally this past weekend at Detroit's Eastern Market and the Michigan Secretary of State office.

The teams from both locations were warmly received. The minute one supporter donned a placard that read, "No to Water Shutoffs," a passerby at the market honked her horn and shouted out the slogan. One young woman from Detroit asked to take a picture of one of the campaigners with another placard that read, "Water is a social right." The team also met two young women from France who said they were encouraged to learn that there was opposition to the shutoffs and wanted to learn more about the SEP campaign.

Lindsay, who was visiting the Eastern Market from out of town, said, "I'm looking for ways to get involved [in the struggle against utility shutoffs]in the right way." After a conversation with an SEP member on the difference between the SEP and other organizations, which are tied to the Democratic Party, Lindsay purchased a copy of the Socialist Equality Party's booklet, "The Truth Behind the Bankruptcy of Detroit" and expressed her willingness to attend the rally this Thursday.

A mother with two kids, La'Trice, discussed the undemocratic character of the shutoffs and the need for resources to be invested back into the city, "The citizens of Detroit are paying for an economic crisis we did not create. Why are we responsible, and why are we paying for something that we did not create? Water is a necessity everyone should have. There need to be more resources given to the city."

Kareen, a teacher for eight years in the Birmingham school district, related the shutoffs to the conditions facing teachers, "To shut off water and give no alternative to these people, the whole world should be appalled. These shutoffs are the same conditions facing teachers. I make less now than when I first started. How am I expected to pay my mortgages and feed my kids?"

Kareen further discussed the issue of tenure and workers' rights. "Tenure no longer means anything. Every year teacher evaluations are getting harder and harder, and the firing of teachers is easier. I never wanted to become rich, that's not why people become teachers, but never did I expect that I would have to apply for welfare."

Martin is a young person who approached SEP campaigners and asked if we were part of the Detroit Water Brigade, an organization, consisting of the Green Party, Moratorium Now and others, which works closely with Democratic Congressman John Conyers.

The campaigners explained how the Obama administration and Democratic Party, not just the Republicans, were using Detroit as a model to carry out a nationwide attack on public sector workers, their pensions and city services. After explaining how the SEP is the only party that truly represents the working class and the need to break from the Democratic Party, Martin replied, "Yeah, I've always had issues with the

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Detroit Water Brigade connections to the Democrats."

Martin added, "It's messed up that capitalists can have more rights than people who have done nothing." Martin thanked SEP members for their struggle and bought a copy of the pamphlet on the Detroit bankruptcy.

Michael J. Abdallah, from the nearby suburb of Royal Oak, expressed his anger over the water shutoffs. "Even though I am from the suburbs and can afford to pay my water bills, I still recognize the principle behind having a right to access to water."

At the Michigan Secretary of State office in downtown Detroit, SEP campaigners spoke to Gerald, a truck driver, who supported the SEP campaign and the planned rally at the Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant. "I am 100 percent behind it. Water should be free. It is a crime shutting off water."

He opposed the attacks being carried out on city of Detroit retirees by the city's emergency manager. "No one should have their pension taken away after working for 30 years. That is a shame. I drive all over the country. I saw an 80-year-old women working at a truck stop. I asked myself, 'what is the world coming to?'"

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