

Workers and young people rally against water shutoffs in Detroit

Our reporters
18 July 2014

About thirty workers, retirees, and students attended a rally called by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) outside the Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant Thursday. Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) from Wayne State University joined water department employees and residents from around Detroit to voice their opposition to the shutoffs of water to thousands of homes

The city of Detroit has launched a campaign to cut off water to tens of thousands of residents who are behind on their water bills. The city's emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, has brought in outside contractors with the goal of shutting off water to 3,000 houses a week. The shutoffs are an important part of the bankruptcy. By removing the less profitable customers, Orr can fetch a higher price in privatizing the third-largest water utility in the US.

Participants held signs declaring "Water is a social right", "Break with the Democrats & Republicans!", "Unite city workers and residents", "No cuts to pensions or healthcare", and "Socialism: Equality for all!"

Lawrence Porter, Assistant National Secretary of the SEP, explained that the purpose of the rally was to make a political appeal to the workers at the plant. He added that the same banks that are demanding water shutoffs are calling for attacks on public workers wages and pensions.

"As opposed to groups like Moratorium Now, we are not appealing to the Democrats and billionaires but to the workers. We call for a massive redistribution of wealth" and a total reorganization of society, Porter said.

"The US is supposedly the richest country in the world and the city is now turning peoples' water off.

How do you explain that?" Porter asked. "This is a joint policy of both parties; The Obama administration supports the bankruptcy. Their policies are creating conditions where people are going to die. This is a social crime."

Richard, a worker at the water treatment plant who participated in the rally, called the shutoffs "draconian." He added, "The United Nations has denounced the water shutoffs; Detroit is like a third world nation."

Regarding the Democrats and Republicans, "I don't trust any of them, there's nobody in a position of power that's going to protect us. We need a revolution to reorganize society. Obama is not what I thought he was going to be. He's too cozy with the rich."

Allen Raybon, a Detroit wastewater treatment plant worker with three years experience stopped to give his support to the rally. "I think the plans to privatize the water department are appalling. The city says it is losing money on the collection of taxes. What happens when all those workers lose their jobs and stop paying taxes? It is tough for workers and their families who are put in this situation.

"These water shutoffs are part of the plan to privatize water, to show that the water department can be profitable. The problem is that they are doing it on the backs of the poor people. It is difficult for workers to pay their bills when their wages are being cut," he said.

Mohammed, an unemployed worker originally from the UK, called the shutoffs "crazy," adding that "Water is a human right." He described the conditions facing workers and young people in Britain, "Youth unemployment in the UK is 25 percent, the government is trying to push for privatization of the National Health Service," he said.

Laverne Holloway, a real estate agent, called the

water shutoffs “inhumane.” She added, “disease and bacteria come without clean water. Without clean water you can’t have clean food or good hygiene,” she said.

Referring to the gentrification of downtown Detroit, she said, “they’re making playgrounds with our tax money. Why are we cutting off peoples’ water for \$50 when the city council gives away billions to the rich? It’s all a conspiracy. It was illegal from beginning to end, they have violated their own laws, including bankruptcy laws. This is a grand theft, not a grand bargain.”

Eliza, who is self-employed, said “I just think the federal government should back off from cutting the necessities of life,” adding, “They are making it harder for people to live. It’s not ok for the bankruptcy court to override the state constitution. It makes you feel unprotected.”

She spoke further about the conditions in Detroit. “My food stamps got cut \$50 a month. One out of three people of those age 16 and above do not have jobs. Prices keep going up as they are cutting jobs. It seems if you don’t have a job or a pension you are being left to die.”

Natalie, who works at a microbrewery, said the water at her apartment in Detroit had recently been shut off. “The same day it happened to me it happened to a coworker,” she said. “I couldn’t take a shower or water my garden. I think of my grandmother who is 91 years old. If she lost her water she doesn’t have anyone to take care of her.”

The SEP will hold another rally at 3:00 PM next Thursday at the Detroit Water Central Services Facility (CSF).



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)