

“We are not living in a democratic society”

Opposition grows to Detroit water shutoffs

Our reporters
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The shut off of water to tens of thousands of Detroit residents has provoked widespread anger and opposition throughout the city and beyond.

As part of a broader corporate-imposed bankruptcy restructuring, the city government, headed by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, has initiated a policy of cutting water to Detroit residents, some of whom are behind in bills by as little as \$150.

The contempt of those in power for people struggling to make ends meet was captured in comments made earlier this week by Orr himself, who called the majority of those who were being cut off “drug addicts, illegal squatters, scofflaws and the people gaming the system.”

The cruel policy has become the focus of broader anger over social inequality in what was once the manufacturing center of America. “I think the water shut-off policy says there are certain people in our society we don’t value, and it’s okay for them to not be valued,” said Anthony Lee, an artist visiting Eastern Market over the weekend. Lee agreed that clean water, like other resources required for life in modern society, is a basic social right that must be guaranteed for all.

“The water shut-offs are illegal,” said Camille, who said she was in danger of being eliminated from receiving water herself. “It’s not just the cost of water, it’s sewage too. For every \$100 in water bills I get, I have to pay nearly three times that for sewage. It’s like you say, these days it’s all about money, for things that should be free in a society like ours.”

Lakisha, a single-mother, said she had been affected personally by the policy. “I had paid the bill for the month, but my landlord had failed to make the payment to the water department,” she said. Lakisha, who shares a flat with her daughter, explained that though the bill had gotten paid the very day that the water was shut off,

it took nearly half a week to get it turned back on. “Water is a human right,” she said.

Anthony Parks, an engineering student, said that the shutoffs were “extremely screwed up, there should be alternative ways of dealing with this. Instead, the Detroit Water Board and the politicians in charge of the city are only concerned about money and power.

“Rather than cutting people off who can’t pay,” Anthony added, “it’s important to ask why half the city is in such a position that they are unable to afford water.” He drew connections to devastated social conditions in Detroit. “We have the lowest income in the country, but the highest water bills.”

Anthony compared the living conditions faced by workers in America to the rhetoric and foreign policy of its leaders. “The US is always condemning other countries for human rights violations, but can’t even take care of its own [people]. We claim to be champions of freedom and democracy, when we allow things like this to happen to our own population.”

Julie Fournier, a Detroit resident, was outraged by the shutoffs, “We are not living in a democratic society. Water is a basic human need, if you don’t have any, you can die within days. The US claims to uphold the Geneva Convention and does *this* to its own people.”

Julie added: “[Thomas] Jefferson said that every 20 years there needs to be a revolution. When people don’t have access to water and their needs are not being met, everyone running things should be fired.”



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