

Thousands face loss of service as water shutoffs resume in Detroit

Thomas Gaist, Shannon Jones
28 August 2014

The city of Detroit, Michigan has once again begun shutting off residents from water service, following a “pause” that ended Monday evening. The shutoffs, aimed at denying a basic requirement of life to thousands of residents, are part of a broader restructuring of the city, which is currently under the control of an emergency manager and the bankruptcy courts.

The water department had announced that 420 households were scheduled to be cut off on Tuesday alone. The city has hired private contractors as part of a \$5.6 million deal to implement the shutoffs. An estimated 45 percent of Detroit’s 175,000 water bills remained unpaid as of Tuesday.

A “pause” was announced last month by the water department, at the urging of bankruptcy court judge Steven Rhodes, in order to create more favorable political conditions to accelerate its brutal policy. A number of “water fairs” were organized to sign residents up for a payment plan, requiring that they pay 10 percent of back bills up front and agree to monthly payments that will increase their water bills.

For the 40 percent of Detroit residents living below the official poverty line, and thousands more struggling to make ends meet amid rising food and gas prices, such a payment plan is unviable. Tens of thousands are being forced to live without running water or sacrifice other basic necessities to pay exorbitant rates.

Those already targeted for shutoff face a series of escalating fines just to have service restored, beginning with \$250 for the first shutoff, then rising to \$500 and more.

David, a 57-year old retiree who spoke to the WSWs outside a water payment center in west Detroit, said, “Things are getting worse every single day around here. Water is a basic necessity and they’re making it

impossible to afford.”

James, a 61-year old retiree, said, “They keep raising the prices because they want to sell off the department. Not long ago I used to pay \$30 every three months. Now it’s \$70 every month. We’re right by the Great Lakes, and suddenly we have the highest rates in the country.”

“We voted down the emergency manager, and they pushed it through anyway. Why should we believe anything will stop them from shutting off our water now, short of us being in the streets?” James asked.

“I know a lot of old people who don’t have water,” said Salliece McCaina, a student at the University of Michigan. “And we live near some of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world. There are corporations that owe six- and seven-figure water bills, but that does not get addressed. The irony is that the people who don’t have money are the ones who get shut off.”

Frank, a building maintenance contractor, said, “They aren’t cutting businesses water off, just the poor. Mike Ilitch (Detroit billionaire) owes a ton of money.”

“They claim there is no money. They have money, tell that to the knuckleheads who don’t know. They raise the water rates and then cut people’s water off. Meanwhile, nothing has been upgraded. Once they raised the rates twice in one year, but there were no improvements to the system,” Frank said.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact