

Support grows for SEP meeting Tuesday against Detroit water shutoffs

A WSWWS reporting team
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Support is building for the public meeting called by the Socialist Equality Party and the Detroit Workers Action Committee to oppose the policy of mass water shutoffs being carried out by the city of Detroit. The meeting is being held on Tuesday, September 9 at Wayne State University.

The water shutoffs reveal the essence of the Detroit bankruptcy process. Critical services are being eliminated, pensions are being slashed and public assets sold off to benefit Wall Street and the wealthy elite that runs Detroit. The meeting is being held to mobilize the working class to oppose the water shutoffs and discuss the broader political perspective required to organize effective opposition.

In preparation for the meeting campaign teams from the SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) visited schools, neighborhoods, work locations and water bill payment centers over the past week. The call for the meeting elicited widespread support and expressions of anger against the inhuman policies being carried out by the Detroit political establishment.

On Saturday, a SEP and IYSSE team campaigned at the Dally in the Alley street festival near Wayne State University.

Shawn Dotson, a part time worker stopped by the SEP information table to express her support for the campaign. She told the *World Socialist Web Site* that her water had been recently shut off. “What happened was I got a bill saying due on the 15th and my water was shut off on the 11th. Then I got a letter saying they were putting the rest of the bill on my taxes.

“The bankruptcy of Detroit is being put on the backs of the people who struggle hard and live in Detroit. We give companies tax cuts, but I haven’t seen them hiring any people.

“I can’t work full time because all I can find is part-time work. It hurts me to see how badly they are treating the working poor.”

Derrick Bailey, a food service worker living in the Detroit suburb of Chesterfield Township, said, “I think water is a basic right like air. The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department infrastructure is so broken down people have received bills for \$500 even though they hardly use any water.

“I have a buddy who was on a program and he was only given two weeks. He went down to their offices to try to negotiate with them and they wouldn’t even talk to him.”

Derrick said he agreed with the warnings being made by the SEP about the assault on democratic rights carried out against the people of Ferguson, Missouri. “I am really passionate about the militarization of the police. We have schools with police forces. You look at the number of SWAT teams we have. They are sending SWAT teams out to serve warrants.

“What happened in Ferguson could happen here in Detroit.”

On Wednesday, on IYSSE campaign team leafleted on the campus of Wayne State University. Bhavana Goparaju, a graduate student at WSU studying Computer Science for her Master’s degree, was one of those expressing support for the campaign. “Water is the primary thing. That and food; those are the basic necessities. How do you live without water?”

“Conditions are hard for many people. The poor become poorer while the rich become richer.

“As an international student from India the burden on us is even heavier than regular students. We pay up to three times the tuition students from within the country pay. This is my first semester here and right before I started they increased the tuition per credit by \$90. This

means that for the whole Master's Degree, which is 33 credits, we are going to pay \$2,970 more than previously."

The *World Socialist Web Site* also spoke to workers at the water bill payment center in downtown Detroit. Ami Coleman is a certified nurse's assistant. She said, "My water was shut off by mistake. I think it was because they were in such a rush to shut off past due bills. It took me two days to get my water turned back on. It was horrible. I had to buy gallon jugs of water and then heat it on the stove like the old school."

"Clean water is definitely a right. I don't understand how metropolises like Detroit can go bankrupt. We have all of these billionaires here, but we are bankrupt? Where is the money going?"

"I think it is highly unfair to take away the pensions of working people. It is an endless cycle. Then how do you expect them to pay their bills?"

Marilyn Rodriguez works part time. She told the WSWS, "My bill is now \$107; it used to be \$86. To be honest it sucks. After paying all my bills I only have a few dollars left, but the bills have to be paid first."

"Why do they make it so hard?"

Another Detroit resident said, "Water shutoffs are horrendous. It is like a military state takeover. They want to drive out the ones who can't afford it. The ones who stood by the city so long are being thrown out."

"When our water was shut off our bill was \$350-\$400. Detroit reminds me of Eastern Europe in the 1990s. It was left in ruins. People are struggling and the city has been left to rot. The jobs being offered are below minimum wage. How do you want people to survive?"

Tammy Mitchell who works for a local homeless shelter stopped to talk to the WSWS about conditions in the city. "I don't feel like it is fair. It is everybody's water, but they are making us pay for it. We are making them rich and they are cutting off water."

"They can put train tracks down Woodward Avenue, but we can't get our streets fixed," she said, referring to the new light rail system, which will serve downtown businesses. "You don't know when your next garbage pickup will come. I don't believe them when they say there is no money when they are spending millions of dollars to build stuff."

"They are building townhouses when there are abandoned buildings that need to be torn down."

"I have to wait all day for a bus. I take a bus every day and it takes me two hours to get to a job. When it is cold it could take four hours to get home. We were standing at the bus stop freezing like popsicles."

Barbara Sloan, another Detroit resident said, "I feel terrible about the water costs. We're really struggling. We're two seniors; my husband is a retired city inspector. How can they expect us to pay these prices?"

"I was put on a payment plan, but was then billed \$551 dollars for one month, which was incorrect. How can the water department be making these huge billing mistakes? A water department worker who came to my house to read the meter told me the billing employees just estimate what people owe and then bill them incorrectly. How can this be allowed?"



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