

Michigan workers speak on the poisoning of Flint water

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Teams of WSWS reporters visited Flint this weekend to speak to residents about the deepening crisis over the poisoning of the water system. Over the last week, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder called out the National Guard into Flint to help with the distribution of water and lead filters in the city and Thursday appealed to President Obama to declare a federal disaster in Flint and provide federal aid, saying the needs of the city surpasses the resources that the state can provide.

Saturday, Obama declared a federal emergency in Flint, but because the catastrophe was not the result of a “natural event,” aid was limited to three months and a paltry sum of \$5 million—working out to \$50 per resident—was the most that could be committed.

Since the poisoning of the city was the result of a cost-cutting measure by the state-appointed emergency manager to switch the city’s water source to the Flint River and sever the decades-long relationship with the Detroit water system, the federal “natural event” loophole is being used to preclude an all-out effort to rectify the damage that has been done to Flint citizens.

Shica, who lives in the northernmost area of Flint which she calls “the projects,” asked WSWS reporters to visit her area. “The situation is affecting us deeply. We are concerned about washing our bodies, cooking our food, brushing our teeth—normal things that people do every day—our lives have been tampered with. It’s not the same.

“It’s sad because nothing is getting done. You’ve got people out here distributing water, but they’re not distributing it to the poorest people of Flint—the people who need it the most. No one has come into this area to distribute anything—filters, water, anything. No one’s knocked on doors ... And we are at the very edge of Flint. We get forgotten all the time. If you cross that yellow line, you’ll be in Mt. Morris. That’s the edge of Flint.”

Neighbor Debra Carter works at a nearby warming center for the homeless. She told the WSWS, “The homeless are being totally forgotten in this situation. No one is delivering water to them on a regular basis.

“I have COPD. A nice steamy hot shower opens up my lungs and makes me feel better. I can’t do that anymore because the lead is vaporized in the steam.

“When we had Flint River water, I have seen them flush out fire hydrants into the street and the water was red with rust. It

never cleared though. When they finally closed the hydrants up, the water was still running rusty.

“We got a lead filter when they were giving them out at U of M [University of Michigan] Flint. But you have to replace the cartridge every two or three months. Where are you supposed to go to get them?”

Over the weekend, events were held in the city by filmmaker Michael Moore on Saturday and longtime Democratic Party advocate Jesse Jackson on Sunday.

The Michael Moore event was a poorly organized media circus. With no loudspeaker system, the media, who surrounded Moore with microphones and all manner of recording devices, were the only ones who could hear anything he was saying. Some 150 people, including the press, attended the event in front of the Flint City Hall.

Flint resident Wanda Kelly spoke with the WSWS. “I have to go out and pick up water every day. And tomorrow, the next day. Every chance I get a chance to do it, I do it.

“The kids are going to school and not allowed to drink the water. It’s bad, how Flint is right now. Downtown development, their water is working good, I’m sure. But when you get beyond Fifth Avenue or so, I think that’s where the water is poison. All the way from Hurley Hospital on down. We have a hospital and still the water is poison. People sick at the hospital are not allowed to drink the water. That’s bad!”

Dave Kroner also attended the Michael Moore event on Saturday. “All of Flint has been poisoned. My granddaughter has been drinking that water! Now you can’t even take a shower. You splash some water in your face and call it day. It’s absurd!

“And I believe Snyder knew it. I believe the EPA knew it. I believe Attorney General Bill Schuette knew it! We’ve got to get all of those folks out of Lansing. I’d like to see the whole Tea Party mess out of Lansing!

“Yes, we absolutely have to rebuild the infrastructure! In 1968 I watched a documentary that said the whole northeastern corridor of the United States, cities need new infrastructure. Because it’s antiquated! My wife worked at the water company here in Flint. She saw guys come in with wooden pipes. Wooden fittings. Right out here off Miller Road. Antiquated!

“But we aren’t getting the money. The man doesn’t pay his

taxes! People pay taxes. The middle class pays taxes. But the man doesn't pay his taxes. I think we are living under an oligarchy now."

There is a tremendous degree of sympathy with the plight of the residents of Flint. In southeast Michigan, many workers are on their own initiative volunteering their time and efforts to bring bottled water up to Flint to help. Some 60 miles south of Flint, Southfield residents Mike Lake and Chris Ray are among them. They spoke to WSWs reporters on Saturday.

"We decided to do what we can to get water to the people in Flint. We're small businessmen. We heard of the need in Flint, so we are getting donations of bottled water from people here and driving it up to Flint later in this afternoon. But we're not just dropping it off at a fire station or something. The people who really need the water aren't getting it. So, we're going into the neighborhoods door-to-door and getting right into the homes of people who need it."

"What's happening in Flint is terrible. We don't want to just be hearing about this on the news, so we decided to do something about it."

Jesse Jackson spoke at a Flint church on Sunday morning before holding a public event later in the afternoon. Kimberly Manley, a DOW Chemical worker, lives down the street from the church.

She denounced the duplicity of city officials as they sought to cover up the effects of the toxic water: "When the water started coming out brown, I went over to my neighbor's, and I said, 'What's going on?' The city officials said they were just doing work on the pipes. The mayor was on TV saying it was safe, and I said, 'That's not true!'"

Since the water switched over, Kimberly's daughter has been diagnosed with Idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP), a disorder caused by low levels of platelets in the blood that can lead to easy or excessive bruising and bleeding.

Her other children have been breaking out in rashes. "My son says his skin breaks out every time he comes to visit," she said. "He breaks out in rashes every time he comes here."

"The social situation here is bad," she added. "It's not just in Flint. What's happening here could happen in other places, too."

After the afternoon Jackson rally, Jennifer Reyna, a student at Oakland University majoring in social work, said, "I've never been to a rally before, so I thought coming to hear Jesse Jackson would be good. But it wasn't what I expected. I thought there would be a solution but he had nothing. I didn't see him offering a solution to the Flint water problem. I was expecting so much more.

"The situation makes me so worried, because I'm getting ready to start a family, but nothing is getting better. Tuition is constantly going up, so college is not getting cheaper. I don't see paying off my student loans until I retire—I already owe \$48,000 without interest being added yet, until I retire!

"I'm quite shocked about what is happening in Flint. I don't

understand why it is taking so long to do anything. Children are being poisoned. The conditions in Flint are like a third world country where people have to fight for water. In the US, there's no work, no water. What are people supposed to do? I had hope for Obama, but nothing he said he would do happened. I listened to his State of the Union speech. What recovery is he talking about?"

Dana Poindexter, an auto parts worker who moved out of Flint a few months ago because of the water situation, also spoke after the Jackson rally. "Many of us were concerned when the announcement to switch the water to the Flint River because we knew the river was polluted. I come from a family of fishermen, and we would never fish there. GM stopped using the river because engine parts were rusting.

"I have small grandchildren so I became very concerned. In the summer of 2014 I noticed brown water spewing out of a fire hydrant. My husband has acne and psoriasis and he got serious problems when the water switched. You have no idea how many times I changed bath wash, detergent, soaps. We were told by the city officials to just boil the water and everything would be okay. And then on top of the poison water, the water bills went way up! Those water bills will kill you. Can you imagine paying for water you can't use? And then they want to shut people off for not paying?

"I think Snyder, Walling, Darnell Earley and all those who had a hand in this are responsible. They all knew and they were never going to tell us until it leaked out. This is about gentrification. Getting rid of the poor and keeping the rich richer. This has been going on for a long time. It's not just in Flint. I don't know who to trust anymore. My father was a GM worker in Flint. They've turned the clock back since then. As workers we get nothing. We are the creators of everything, we make it all happen and we get nothing in return."



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