Autoworkers speak on Flint water crisis

Shannon Jones
22 January 2016

"This is what you get when you want to run government like a business"

The crisis over lead-tainted water in Flint, Michigan is evoking outrage throughout the US and internationally. To date, only a pitiful amount of federal and state aid has been made available to assist Flint residents.

Meanwhile, parents must cope with the fact that their children may be irreparably damaged by drinking lead-laced water. Long-term effects include mental and physical impairments, with children under six particularly at risk.

Flint, a former automotive manufacturing center has been ravaged by plant shutdowns, with devastating consequences for the lives of residents. General Motors, which once employed 80,000 workers in the city, now employs around 5,500.

The crisis is taking place alongside of a crisis in nearby Detroit, where thousands of teachers have staged sickout protests over conditions in the schools, including overcrowded classrooms and roach and rodent infested school buildings. The protests have been held in defiance of both the Democratic city administration and the Detroit Federation of Teachers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently contacted a number of Michigan autoworkers to discuss the Flint situation, as well as the protests by teachers in Detroit.

Mary, who works at the Fiat Chrysler Warren Stamping plant north of Detroit, said a lot of workers at her facility had been discussing the situation in Flint. "It is not good for the kids. [Lead poisoning] is not something that can be taken back. Everyone is talking about how bad it is for the kids. They didn't care about what happened to the kids.

"I think [Governor] Snyder is a total hypocrite. He makes a big thing about foster kids because he supposedly cares about the poorest kids. But Flint is the reality. I think everyone who knew about it should be held accountable. There are developmental issues and long-term health effects.

"These government agencies are supposed to make things as safe as possible. What are they paying these people for? They tell you what you should and should not be doing, then they cover this up. It is still such a shock to me that something like this could go on so an emergency manager could save a few bucks.

"This is what you get when you want to run government like a business."

Cary, a worker at Nexteer automotive in Saginaw, Michigan, just north of Flint, told the WSWS he was outraged by the handling of the water crisis. "Nobody cares about Flint. General Motors used to run that city, then they moved everything out. It's insane. I blame GM for the situation both in Detroit and in Flint. Instead, they want to give GM tax cuts.

"I think there is no recovery for either city. US cities are becoming garbage dumps because the government has not maintained anything. You have to maintain stuff or it will fall apart. Look at the situation with bridges in Michigan.

"It is a ladder of corruption and it gets deeper and deeper as it gets to the top."

Terry, a worker at the Fiat Chrysler Warren Truck Plant said, "Who is going to be held accountable? There should be repercussions. When something like his happens it is always passed around until it is passed to nobody. They all kept their mouths shut."

Rick, another Warren Truck worker said, "I think the emergency manager should be held accountable along with Governor Snyder and the mayor. It seems like whoever gave the ok without proper tests should be

© World Socialist Web Site

thrown in jail. This was all just to save a few million dollars. Now they owe far more than that.

"There are a lot of crazy things going on. I just recently found out that the same emergency manager they had over Flint is now running the Detroit Public Schools."

Speaking about the recent protests by Detroit teachers over conditions in the schools, he added, "It doesn't seem like the unions are fighting for us anymore. They are just puppets."

William, another Warren Truck worker spoke on the struggle by Detroit teachers, "It is good they are taking a stand. What has happened to the schools did not take place overnight. It has been going on since I was in middle school when we were forced to share textbooks."

Barb, a veteran worker at Warren Truck, said she was outraged over the situation in Flint. "They should have had common sense. The infrastructure is falling apart. There are reasons they weren't using the water from the Flint River for all those years. The actions of Governor Snyder and all the officials are criminal, but they won't be prosecuted."

On the Detroit teachers she said, "I am glad the teachers decided to unite with a rank-and-file group outside the union.

"The UAW has been paid off. They are shipping the Ram truck out of Warren Truck to Sterling Heights. The two-tier workers who are going to be laid off should get their union dues back as far as I am concerned."

Ron, a worker at the Delta GM plant in Lansing, said, "I grew up in Flint. I think the governor really dropped the ball. He was hiding e-mails where it showed he knew there were problems. As far as I am concerned he should be in jail. There is nothing they can really do to compensate the people who were hurt. It is all about the bottom line, the dollar."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site