

Residents speak out against Flint water disaster at Congressional hearing

Our reporter
5 February 2016

The poisoning of the population of Flint, Michigan, has provoked widespread outrage. Snowballing revelations that water quality officials had for months knowingly violated federal water safety regulations and criminally covered it up, precipitated the holding of a Congressional hearing on Flint, Wednesday.

The implications of developments in Flint are vast, creating a profound political crisis for both capitalist political parties. The systematic poisoning of the entire population of a city that was once an industrial powerhouse, has garnered worldwide attention.

Not only are the official environmental agencies blameworthy for this disaster, but representatives of both Republican and Democratic Parties are complicit. The hearing in Washington, DC, revealed the utter panic of the two big business parties, faced with mass opposition to their criminal policies.

Virginia Tech University water expert Dr. Marc Edwards testified on the “callous disregard” of regulatory officials, most recently played out in Flint. He said, “Residents there have been living a surreal experience. It’s part *1984*, part *Enemy of the People* [referring to George Orwell’s novel and Hendrik Ibsen’s play]. And I am personally ashamed that the profession I belong to—the drinking water industry in this country—has allowed this to occur.”

While politicians mouthed empty phrases of sympathy for the plight of Flint’s residents before the news cameras, two busloads of residents from Flint and Detroit who traveled overnight to take part in the hearing, were immediately set upon by groups of armed guards as they entered the building. As they lined up outside of the hearing room, attendees were warned not to block the hallway or speak during the hearing, or else they would be arrested. “This has never happened before,” stated one Congressional staff member of the

large turnout.

Jammed into overflow rooms around the building, many were forced to sit on floors or stand. Workers expressed frustration and distrust for their Congressional hosts. “Why did she say the behaviors of Snyder were *almost* criminal” said one Flint resident, commenting on remarks made by Washington, DC, Democratic Representative Eleanor Holmes-Norton at the hearing. Other attendees could be heard grumbling in disbelief as Congressional Republicans and Democrats took turns attempting to shift blame for the social catastrophe from one to the other.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Michael, who came to Washington with the two busloads of other Flint residents, gave his thoughts on the proceedings, “I think it could be a set-up. It seems like they’re going to place the blame on somebody for the lead, but then it will just be business as usual.”

Speaking of his own conditions, Michael said “I’ve been affected by the lead poisoning. My girlfriend’s two-year old son has it. It’s been real hard.”

C. Hall, a worker from Washington, DC, lived through the 2001-2004 lead-in-water crisis in the US capital. She said that she had been buying bottled water for several years, since that crisis, which had been covered up by officials even longer than they did in Flint. “They did it all to save money,” she said, speaking about Flint. Hall was outraged that it took two years for the contamination to be acknowledged, “did they just think they could hide?”

“I want justice to be done. If anything, you can quote me on that” she concluded, adding that the public officials involved in the lead poisonings had no concern for the population.

“They knew about it from the beginning,” interjected Markita Blanchard, a janitor from the city of Detroit

who traveled overnight to attend the hearing. “[Michigan Governor] Snyder refused to use Flint River water in his municipal buildings in Flint, even while he told the city’s people that the water all came from the same place.

“The same thing happened in Detroit,” she added, “they shut thousands of people’s water off in the city for not paying their bills, but allowed Comerica Park, Ford Field, and other big businesses to not pay.

“Now they’re privatizing public housing. [Quicken Loans CEO] Dan Gilbert just bought the Martin Luther King Apartments and is going to move the poor people out of those homes.”



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